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John Parr Cox

PARR TERMINAL: FIFTY YEARS OF INDUSTRY ON THE RICHMOND WATERFRONT

An Interview Conducted by
Judith K. Dunning
in 1986

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Copy no. _____



JOHN PARR COX

COX, John Parr (b. 1918)

businessman

Parr Terminal: Fifty Years of Industry on the Richmond Waterfront, 1992, 195 pp

Visalia family background; industrialist Fred D. Parr; Parr-McCormick Steamship Line, and Port of Oakland, 1915; beginning Parr Terminal, Richmond, 1926; Richmond waterfront industries, 1930s-1950s: Ford Motor Co., Filice & Perrelli Canning Co.; Terminals No. 1-4; Pt. San Pablo: Winehaven, fish reduction plants, 1930s-1940s; World War II shipbuilding; containerization; Japanese ties; future for Port of Richmond.

Interviewed 1986 by Judith Dunning, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

The Regional Oral History Office would
like to express its thanks to:

Parr Terminal, Ltd.

for the encouragement and support which
have made possible this oral history
memoir of John Parr Cox.

INTERVIEW HISTORY--John Parr Cox

John Parr Cox, the retired president of Parr-Terminal Ltd. and nephew of industrialist Fred D. Parr, was interviewed in his San Francisco office between 1985 and 1986. Parr Terminal Company was the single most important developer of the Port of Richmond, California. With the signing of the Parr lease in 1926, the company began a lucrative and sometimes stormy fifty-year partnership with the city of Richmond. Because most of the original business records were lost during a move, the oral history provides documentation of the Parr Terminal history that would otherwise be lost.

Groomed for the family business, Mr. Cox recalled, "On my thirteenth birthday my uncle took me to one side and said, 'From now on you carry your own weight. We'll pay you a man's wages to do a man's work.'" Beginning in the 1930s and continuing through the 1980s, Mr. Cox's jobs at Parr Terminal ranged from watchman to company president. He operated caterpillar tractors, forklifts, and steam locomotives. In his own words, "There's no job on the waterfront that I cannot do, and I've never owned a piece of equipment that I couldn't run."

Before devoting his career to the Richmond waterfront, Mr. Cox attended the University of the Pacific, studying a diverse range of subjects from astronomy to Asian literature. Today he continues a keen interest in Japanese history and poetry. Through his business, Mr. Cox has made over thirty trips to Japan.

In his oral history, Mr. Cox spoke about his uncle, Fred D. Parr, an outstanding figure in the shipping industry who promoted Richmond as an industrial center. He was responsible for bringing Ford Motor Company, the Filice and Perrelli Canning Company, and more than one hundred industries to the Richmond waterfront. Fred Parr played a key role in having the Kaiser industry locate their massive shipbuilding operations in Richmond during World War II.

Having spent a lifetime on the waterfront, Mr. Cox offers an insider's view on the transition of American industry from smokestack to service. His oral history complements another project completed by the Regional Oral History Office, called "On the Waterfront: An Oral History of Richmond, California." In this community project, twenty local residents were interviewed, many of whom worked in Richmond canneries, fisheries, and shipyards. Mr. Cox's oral history adds one more layer to the complex story of the Richmond waterfront.

Because of a pending lawsuit, there were some topics, especially in the area of toxic waste, that were not covered during these interviews. I hope, at a later time, that Mr. Cox will write a supplement to this story.

Judith K. Dunning
Interviewer/Editor

10 February 1992
Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library
University of California, Berkeley

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please write clearly. Use black ink.)

Your full name John Parr Cox
Date of birth Mar 7 - 1918 Birthplace San Francisco CA
Father's full name Frank Van Ness Cox
Occupation Dead Birthplace New York
Mother's full name Vera Parr Cox
Occupation Dead Birthplace Visalia Calif
Your spouse Janis Tayot Cox
Your children Cathleen Diane Cox

Where did you grow up? San Francisco CA
Present community San Francisco CA
Education College Pacific Stockton B.A

Occupation(s) Retired - Pres. Parr Richmond Terminal
Parr Terminal Railroad Ocean Transport
Areas of expertise Marine Ship Operation & Transportation

Other interests or activities Japanese History & Poetry
Sister City Program USA & Japan Cities

Organizations in which you are active Boatman's Club - St Francis Yacht Club
Tokyo Yacht Club - Olympic Club - World Trade Club

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Family_Background

[Date of Interview: June 17, 1986] ##

Dunning: What is your full name?

Cox: John Parr Cox.

Dunning: What year were you born?

Cox: I was born November 19, 1918.

Dunning: How about your parents, where were they born?

Cox: My father was born in New York state, where his father operated a river freighting business. He had two very small steam-powered vessels. My maternal grandmother Bertha was born in Pennsylvania. I believe that their family had some merchant background, and were also farmers. My paternal grandfather was born back in Middletown, New York, and my paternal grandmother was born in one of the adjoining states.

Dunning: Do you know approximately when your family came to the United States, and from where in Europe?

Cox: My ancestry, I've been told, comes from two different locations in the British Isles. The Parrs came principally from southern England. The Coxes came from extreme northern England, and mostly from Scotland. It's my impression that the Coxes came over here somewhat earlier than the Parrs. My maternal grandfather was born in the United States, but he was a youngest son of his family and I think there were only

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Cox: two children that lived. The others remained in England, to the best of my knowledge. They had some relationship with the Parrs, who were considerable landowners in England. My grandfather was raised in Kentucky.

Father Joins the Railroad at Age Thirteen

Dunning: What was that grandfather's name?

Cox: His name was John Rice Parr, and he was raised in Kentucky, where he apparently had a ranch where horses were the principal product. My grandfather Cox never came to California, he stayed in the East where he ran a river boat line. He was involved in river transportation and warehousing. My father, Frank Cox, was born back in the Middletown area, and he had an older brother named John who came as a very young boy to work on the railroads going west. His stories inspired my father at about the age of thirteen and a half to run away with his older brother and join the railroads.

Dunning: Did they join the transcontinental lines?

Cox: Yes, the transcontinental lines. The Union Pacific was pretty well constructed. My father was a very bright young boy and became a telegrapher almost immediately. I believe he practiced telegraphy as a boy, and his older brother stayed with the railroads until the formation of the Southern Pacific. At that time his older brother, due to ill health, left railroading and went to Marin County, where he had a small business.

My father kept going west from station to station as a telegrapher and getting promoted. He became assistant road master for the Southern Pacific, and although he had been a freight conductor as part of his

Cox: duties, he didn't have damaged hands. In those days trains were coupled with links of chain, not with the automatic couplers of today, and a badge of a conductor or brakeman was to have one or more fingers gone. In those days, also, Westinghouse had not yet perfected the air brake, and going downgrade, or through any kind of city or town, each train would have about six brakemen who had to climb up and walk along the tops of the cars with clubs in order to put in the brake handles to tighten the brakes. They got their signals from their engineer by whistle as to whether they were to tighten brakes or not.

Anyway, he didn't stay long at that because they made him assistant road master.

Dunning: You said your father left home at thirteen--did he start working immediately?

Cox: Instantly. Oh, it was not unusual--hell, boys went to sea at that age.

Dunning: How old was his brother?

Cox: His brother was about fourteen or fifteen.

Dunning: And they never went back home?

Cox: Oh, I think they visited a couple of times, but I don't believe that there was an idea of going back for good. They were all going west, everybody was going west.

Dunning: This was before the turn of the century?

Cox: Oh, yes. The country was in turmoil, the Civil War had worn itself out. My father came to California still with the Southern Pacific, and again he alternated between roadmaster and trainmaster for different divisions. When I was born, he was the general superintendent of the bayshore shops down at a place

Cox: called Brisbane now, where they used to have enormous yards for the repairing of locomotives. At any one time there would be never less than twenty and sometimes as much as fifty locomotives from all over the Pacific Coast division coming in there to have their boilers rebuilt and tubes rerolled. There's really a thousand and one things you have to do to maintain a steam engine.

The railroad cars, such as the Pullman cars, which were owned by the Pullman Company and leased to the railroads, all went to Richmond to be repaired at a big plant over there. Freight cars were repaired up and down the line. They were all wooden in those days. The thirty-foot boxcar was the standard size of a boxcar in those days. Three thousand gallons was the standard size of a tank car. When I was very little and I used to clamber over the tracks with my father's hand, and hear the sounds of all this work, it was really fantastic.

I believe then in the bayshore shops there were over a thousand employees. My father had an interesting experience: there was a shipment of gold coins, minted in the San Francisco mint, and for some reason they wanted to send them east. My father volunteered to act as the guard inside the car that was handling the gold coins--it was hooked to a passenger train. Apparently some people knew about it, and the train was held up down around Salinas. The engine was turned over, and my father took an axe and broke some holes through the wooden siding and was able to fire shots at the people who were trying to break into the car, and they ran away and didn't get anything. But he was promoted once again.

Dunning: Because of that incident?

Cox: Yes. He became the division superintendent for the San Luis Obispo to San Francisco division at the Southern Pacific. This was a pretty good job, because they were running these high-speed passenger trains. There was the Owl, the Lark, the Overland Limited, and a lot of high-speed passenger trains. Then there were regular, standard passenger accommodations, and then the freights. There were no trucks in those days that made any distance, so everything went by train. Southern California was a nice division to work on. When my father left the railroad he took my mother and myself on my first Pullman trip. I must have been three or four years old at the time.

Dunning: Do you know approximately how old your father was when he left the railroad? Was he still a young man?

Cox: No, he was not a young man. When he left the railroad, he must have been fifty-six or seven.

The Cox Family Connects with Fred D. Parr

Dunning: So you were born late in his life.

Cox: Oh, yes, he married my mother after about a two month courtship, and at that time my mother, who was Vera Parr, introduced him to my uncle, Fred D. Parr. My uncle at that time was trying to build an operation on the Oakland waterfront, and so my father invested heavily in that enterprise. That is how I was more or less brought into our family, because everybody was putting all their money into the Parr-McCormick Steamship Line, and into the affairs of the Port of Oakland, and we all lived together, all the Parrs and all the Coxes.

Dunning: In San Francisco?

Cox: Yes.

Dunning: What was your mother's name?

Cox: My mother's name was Vera Parr.

Dunning: How old was she when she married your father?

Cox: I think, if I'm not mistaken, she was about thirty-two or thirty-three.

Dunning: So it was a May-December marriage?

Cox: Well, somewhat, you might say, but in those days it was more common.

Dunning: Was this your father's first marriage?

Cox: No, it was his second marriage. My father was a reasonably good piano player. He met a woman in San Francisco who was a concert singer. Occasionally he would accompany her, when he had the time, when she was having concerts in the area, and he would sometimes play the piano while she sang. The piano was the principal instrument of entertainment in the home--that and the phonograph. Radios were not very frequent in homes, and they ran by batteries. There were not very many programs. So singing and piano playing were main pastimes.

My mother could play the piano very well. Not concert grade, but in the home she was a good artist. My aunt, Pearl Rice Parr, who was the youngest, was a large woman--all my family were tall.

I think I should go back a little bit to talk about the Parrs.

Parr-Influence-on-John-Parr-Cox

Dunning: Yes, I would like to hear as much of that family background as possible before we get into the business.

Cox: The major influences in my life, and the people that brought me to where I am, are basically the Parrs. My grandfather, John Rice, died in 1918 of what was then called the Spanish Influenza, which started at the end of the war. This was decimating millions of people all over the world. Uncle John Dallas Parr had joined the ambulance corps, and he was killed by the flu. He never did get to Europe. He came to New York, and they shipped him home, and he died at home.

Grandmother-Bertha-Demory-Parr

Cox: My maternal grandmother never got the flu. She was the most remarkable person I ever met.

Dunning: What was her full name?

Cox: Bertha Demory Parr.

Dunning: Why was she remarkable to you?

Cox: I'll tell you why--with her husband, she drove the wagon train from St. Louis as far as Reno.

Dunning: She drove it?

Cox: Yes. Unlike the earlier pioneers, they had eight big mules that were in fine shape before they started, and the paths were pretty well laid out. There was no

Cox: Indian problem, and they came across in pretty good time, and they brought a lot of their furniture with them. They hauled two wagons, one behind the other.

Dunning: Who was in that group?

Cox: I understand that there were about ten families in the entire party.

My grandmother was an expert on ranching. When I was a little boy--very little--she used to take me by the hand when they were thinking of buying property. She used to let the "boys"--that was the men, my uncle, and occasionally my father--go into a ranch house to talk about land that was for sale. But she never went in, she'd walk around and have me pick up soil and taste it. She'd say, remember that taste, because that's black alkali, and nothing will grow there. Then she'd say, look across the street, you see those sunflowers? But there are no sunflowers on this side of the road--what does that tell you? Well, it means that the soil's not quite as good over here, it's too boggy.

My grandmother was also very good at cattle. She showed me how to assist a heifer having trouble with her first calf. I'll never forget when I was driving down the road with her one time, and she slammed on the brakes, and said, "We've got to do something about that cow." I looked over here, and there was a great big bloated cow. It got out of the field somehow, out of the regular pasture and got into alfalfa and had swollen up like a balloon. She took a pair of scissors out of her pocketbook and said, "Now, look--put your hand on the hip, one palm's width, and you stand in front of it and stab it for all you're worth."

Dunning: Stab it?

Cox: Yes. And she did. And the gas, which was killing the cow, just blew out of that poor cow--I would say with a stream of at least four feet. Then she wrote a nasty note, went over to the farmhouse and put it on the farmhouse, because they had abandoned the cow. She was like that.

Dunning: Where was this?

Cox: This particular incident occurred on the way to Stockton, but we always had ranches all around the state. They had properties in Marysville, they had big properties in Visalia, they rented properties at Lemon Grove, and they owned ranches up at Lincoln, which is on the other side of Sacramento, where they'd raise barley.

Parr Family Home in Visalia

Cox: Visalia was the home of the Parrs, that is, that's where my grandmother and grandfather landed. He developed a chain of slaughterhouses and became the biggest purveyor of wholesale meats to Los Angeles, which was only a small city then. He owned over a thousand acres in the Kettleman Hills, which became a great oil center. He sold that land for three dollars an acre because the cattle were dying from polluted water. The oil would seep out of the ground and was considered to be unfit for cattle.

Dunning: Can you give me an idea about when this was, what decade?

Cox: I would say around 1900.

Dunning: Did they come to California with money, or did they make it when they got here?

Cox: Oh, they sold all of their property in the east, but they made money here.

Dunning: They invested in land as soon as they got here?

Cox: Oh, yes. They were always tied to the land. It became a passion of my uncle Fred to always have land. He considered himself a man of the soil first, and anything else was superimposed on that love.

The San Joaquin Fever

Cox: In those days they were in Visalia, and in the San Joaquin Valley there were lots of deaths because of the San Joaquin Fever. Most of the men would bring horses in big wagons, some of them like covered wagons, some of them open wagons drawn by horses. They'd load up the women and children and take them over to the coast, very near Pismo Beach, where they'd stay for two months. All the men would return and continue keeping the livestock up, and in about two months they'd go back and pick up the folks on the coast.

Dunning: What was the San Joaquin Fever?

Cox: The vector was a mosquito, but it was not common malaria, it was a different strain.

Dunning: Just in the San Joaquin area?

Cox: That's the only place I know about it. The same disease may have been elsewhere. But the land was low, and there was lots of water, and it was very, very hot and humid in the summer. Babies would die like flies of this thing.

Cox: On the last trip that this tour made by wagon my mother drove four mules. She was a big, tall woman, and powerful, strong. She was the leader of the children because she was older by two or three years.

Dunning: Did she have a lot of brothers and sisters?

Cox: Yes. Of course it was herself, and then her brother Fred, and then another brother John Dallas Parr, and then there was Pearl Parr. That was the family.

Fred Parr Studies Business

Cox: They thrived in the San Joaquin Valley, and my uncle Fred was taken up with a study of business. He got a chance to go to Heald Business College, and he lived with Professor Heald. We have his diploma somewhere.

Dunning: Was Heald Business College in San Francisco at that time?

Cox: Yes. He received one hundred percent in all of his grades except mathematics. The professor gave him ninety-nine and said, no one knows everything there is to know about mathematics, so I'll give you ninety-nine. He was very brilliant, no question about it. He finally moved up here in about 1905. He had a nice apartment on, I think, Walnut Street. They disposed of all their properties but the home ranch in Visalia. They went through the 1906 earthquake with no particular problems. They told different anecdotes. They were inconvenienced but not in any way hurt. The fire never reached their apartment.

Employment with E. J. Dodge Lumber Company

Cox: When my uncle graduated from Heald he became a bookkeeper for the E. J. Dodge Lumber Company. Old Mr. Dodge was not in good health, and he saw this bright young man with a lot of potential, so he gave him a chance to put his money into the firm. In about two years my uncle was a partner with E. J. Dodge.

Dunning: Right out of school.

Cox: Yes. And as I have known him in later years I'm not surprised. It emerged, though not immediately, that he had a plan. You see, all these lumber companies up and down the coast couldn't get their lumber to San Francisco until they developed what was known as a steam schooner, generally run by Scandinavian crews called colloquially on the waterfront "the Scawegian Navy." All these vessels were bringing lumber down and going back light, so my uncle conceived the idea of chartering the space in a number of these northbound empty ships and contracting to haul freight north.

It was very successful because they were starting to build the Alaskan railroads--in fact, they'd been under construction for some time--but they really decided to extend it. He got the contract for most of the railroad rails and the metal parts up to the points close to the sea where they could discharge this cargo. He got another contract from the government to haul school supplies to the ice-bound schools.

##

These big vessels were very adequate for this because they could sit on the mud at low tide and a sled would come out. They would pick up the supplies and take them to the schools.

Parr-McCormick Steamship Line

Cox: At that time Fred Parr formed a partnership with Charles R. McCormick. They formed the Parr-McCormick Steamship Line, and they built larger vessels. They built two big passenger ships--I say "big" for those days--carrying 150 passengers.

Dunning: Did the ships have a particular name?

Cox: There were two ships. No, they were just huge steam schooners, bigger than average, made out of wood. They carried six men in a cabin, and it was ten dollars to Portland, with your baggage on deck. With your baggage in the cabin you paid another ten dollars. We had the City of Topeka and the John B. Stetson. Those were the passenger ships. Actually we built many more. At one time the Parr-McCormick fleet had, either under ownership or charter, thirty-five ships. They were the biggest factor in the coastal trade, particularly northbound.

The Prisonship Success

Dunning: Were they all kept in San Francisco?

Cox: They went up and down the coast, but the base was San Francisco. All these ships--the ones that we built, anyway--had enormous towing winches on the stern. We would occasionally tow huge rafts of logs, principally to Los Angeles and San Diego. We also towed the prisonship Success from Seattle harbor. It was the last prisonship the navy owned.

Dunning: Can you tell me more about that?

Cox: Not much to tell. We picked her up--there were a few prisoners on board, not many-- [interruption, tape off]

Dunning: [tape on] We were talking about the prisonship.

Cox: In those days it was called a hulk, the mass had been stepped, and all the top hamper was gone. The masts had been removed, except for short stubs used to handle cargo booms, because they had to bring their own water aboard. They loaded provisions, and took people on and off, and there were a few guards. She was picked up by another towboat somewhere around the vicinity of Panama. Anyway it was the first eastbound tow through the canal, as far as I know. I wasn't alive then, so I can't tell you much about it except from anecdotes that I've heard. But these big vessels towed barges up and down the coast as well as carrying cargo. It was a rather profitable business.

Demise of the American Merchant Service

Dunning: Did they have much competition at the time?

Cox: Not too much. There were many other steamship companies. You must understand that these were the days when every ship had an owner that operated these ships. Today--and that's the trouble with the American Merchant

Cox: Service--owners don't run their companies any more. They're run by paid managers who couldn't care less really, so long as they kept getting their paycheck. In those days, the owners could tell on a map where their vessel was, how much fuel per day she was consuming, and it was wonderful. But the demise of the merchant service started when first generation owners began to die or retire.

World War I:--Government Seizes Ships

Dunning: Fred Parr was a first generation owner?

Cox: Yes. That Parr-McCormick Steamship Line really thrived. Then, about 1914, the government seized most of the ships--in fact, virtually all of them--for many jobs, including the hauling of spruce for airplanes on the Alaskan coast. My uncle founded the California-Alaska Coal Company, and one of the few mistakes he made in his life was to allow an inexperienced engineer to build a pier. It went out almost a half a mile into the water. Two things happened simultaneously, both of which he should have known about. One was an incident where there were two locomotives out on the pier. The ice formed and lifted the pier more than a mile from shore. I remember the photograph of the pier with the two locomotives going out with the ice, and the ice broke up. The other occurrence was that the Pacific fleet went from coal to oil.

Now, all those things had been predicted, but he got too enthused by his own verbiage, I guess.

Dunning: Was this up in Alaska that this happened?

Cox: Oh, yes.

Dunning: Earlier, when you said that during World War I the government siezed the vessels, does that mean that they had a contract?

Cox: In effect they bought them, through the process of condemnation.

Dunning: So Fred Parr really didn't have a choice at that time.

Cox: No, no choice at all.

Port of Oakland

Dunning: Did he stay involved?

Cox: He stayed involved in another manner. He knew the city of Oakland pretty well, and he knew that they had great potential as a port, so in one of the family meetings-- my family always met in the evenings, with my grandmother presiding, and all of the living children appearing, and my mother, of course. My brother Fred and myself were allowed to sit in as long as we weren't bored. I remember them discussing about going to Oakland, and the problems of going to Oakland and building a large pier there. This is when my uncle began to find his true vocation, which was developing projects.

Dunning: He was really a mastermind then?

Cox: Yes, I think so. He found all this submerged land over in Oakland and he worked out a plan to extend the sewers. See, the water used to lap at the tracks at the Sixteenth Street station, which is now the Southern Pacific Railroad station. That's now a full mile away from the waterfront. What he proposed to do was to get spoils or tailings from the army dredgers, who were

Cox: dredging up and down the inner harbor of Oakland, and pump them into an impounding basin and make new land to develop an outer harbor. The Army Corp of Engineers said that would be very acceptable, because they were running out of places to dump the spoils. But he had to have a breakwater to impound this stuff, and to get a breakwater he had to get a vote from the citizens of Oakland to have a bond issue. Well, there was no chance of getting a bond issue, so he started out a publicity campaign that was very effective.

Publicity Campaign to Extend the Sewers

Cox: They used to haul the garbage from Oakland on two steam schooners out halfway to the Farallon Islands and dump it. There was a transfer point in the inner harbor, and my uncle and a photographer went down one night and took pictures of the rats running around. One picture was particularly excellent. It showed a gigantic rat, who had heard the noise and turned his head and stared right into the camera and snarled, and they took a picture. Seeing this picture my uncle got the idea. He took the centerfold of the Oakland Tribune, and this gigantic rat--it was blown up to the point where the body of it was twenty-four inches long at least--was snarling right at you. Underneath he had a clipping, just normal size, from somebody that had let a baby out on the lawn and a rat had nipped the baby. And then he had one sentence: "Mothers of Oakland, do you want this to happen to your child? Vote for the breakwater bonds so we can extend the sewers."

It passed by a tremendous majority. Then the land was filled, and he made a contract with the then City Council.

Dunning: What period are we talking about now?

Cox: We're talking about 1915 and 1916. When I was a little boy we had that ad framed. It was framed for a number of years in our office.

Dunning: Is it still around?

Cox: No. Hell, everything from those days is gone, gone, gone.

Fred Parr had made a contract with the City Council, or supervisors that if they would give him a lease on the property he would build a dock and conduct a shipping operation there. But they said he had to bring an oil company to that area.

Dunning: For what reason?

Cox: Because they wanted to have a factory on that property.

Dunning: That would be the main business.

Cox: Yes. Well, he did, he brought an oil company, but not the right kind--he brought a huge vegetable oil plant there.

Dunning: Not what they had in mind.

Cox: No. He also brought the General Petroleum, which had a smaller operation, and he brought a sulfur processing company, and he brought about four or five other companies on the land. [interruption to look for photos, tape off]

The Oakland Mole

Cox: I remember that opening very well. You see, the property that he filled abutted the then Oakland Mole of

Cox: the Southern Pacific Railroad, which was a transfer point for passenger cars from steam train to ferryboat. The Oakland Mole was a wonderful place. You'd see these big transcontinental steam engines come in with their brakes smoking and burning--you could smell the metal and the sulfur burning. Everyone else hated it, but that was just like being in a candy shop for me, I loved that. Sometimes my father would shove me up into the cab and introduce me to the engineers who were all grimy from their trips over the "hump", as they called the division from Sparks, Nevada down to Roseville. Generally, they stayed on until they came to San Francisco. The cars were all streaked and dirty, but they had a good smell--I liked that.

There was a huge plant, a mill--Albers Milling Company--and they were known for that sign showing a miner flipping pancakes over a fire. For many years that was their trademark on boxes. The Albers Milling Company sent us a band to play the opening. I'll never forget that. Then my uncle got some friends to get a couple of ships to come over and lay alongside, to look like we were busy, and they had about two thousand people around. First, they had a dinner for about three or four hundred, then the mayor of San Francisco, and the mayor of Oakland, and a representative of the governor's office went on with that ceremonial foolishness for a little while. It was very boring. The fire department put on a show with hoses, and a fireboat came over on the water side. It was quite a thing.

That operation went rather successfully as a terminal, but there was one thing: the city of Oakland kept saying, "You brought the wrong kind of an oil company." So my uncle said, "All right, I'll tell you what we'll do, you buy me out--buy out the company." So they did.

Beginning of Parr Terminal, Richmond

Cox: Before that transaction was completed, there was a meeting of the Richmond Chamber of Commerce in the Carquinez Hotel up at Richmond.

The city of Richmond wanted to stop running a municipal pier. They had Terminal No. 1 at the outer harbor and they were just losing money hand over fist, so they wanted a private operator. So the Richmond people came over to our office in San Francisco and solicited my uncle to take a look at Richmond.

Dunning: Was the company called Parr Terminal?

Cox: At that time it was Parr Terminal, yes. Then, this was the beginning of many adventures for me, having to ride over, because my grandmother and my mother and my aunt would ride over to Richmond, taking a ferry from San Francisco over to Richmond. My father was away on the railroad most of the time.

Dunning: Would you disembark at Ferry Point?

Cox: Yes. The city dug a tunnel out to give access to the area at the outer harbor, and they made a deal with the Southern Pacific to build a ferry slip at the end of this road, which the Southern Pacific did. That was the

Cox: location of Terminal No. 1. Terminal No. 1 was kind of a funny building. It only accommodated one ship, and it had about sixty thousand feet gross inside the walls. That was split in half by depressed railroad tracks. The waterfront side of that particular dock was made to handle steel, and there was an overhead crane which was used to move steel from the Bethlehem Steel Company coming in by vessel.

A few years later the city of Richmond built the back half, but because there were depressed railroad tracks splitting the two halves of the building, the bay side from the land side, it was very difficult to utilize the rear side. You had to bring in a couple of box cars and put steel plates between the box cars in order to run cargo from one side to the other.

Dunning: Whose design was that?

Cox: Oh, it was a design by some engineers that were brought in. Now, there's an interesting anecdote that I don't think many people remember. The Santa Fe Railroad had built a large transfer terminal to put railroad cars on car floats, which was just about half a mile to the west. They owned a lot of that property, and after Terminal One was built by the city of Richmond, the city decided to charge the Santa Fe ten cents a ton for every ton that went over the railroad and waterfront--as they were entitled to do, because they did use some city-owned, public land out in front. But to the horror of the city of Richmond, they found out that when they added on this new back to the terminal, one half of the terminal, they'd built on Santa Fe land. There was a tremendous fuss, which was eventually settled by the Santa Fe agreeing to exchange the right [of the city] to collect tolls forever from the Santa Fe, for the Santa Fe's giving them free title to the property.

Dunning: So it was somebody's mistake.

Cox: Yes. Well, in those days people were building in a gung-ho spirit with everything.

Parr Negotiations for Richmond Waterfront Lease

Dunning: I'd like to hear a little more about your uncle's departure from the Port of Oakland, and how long a process that was until he decided to come to Richmond. Have you ever heard any stories about the negotiations for the Richmond waterfront lease? You were pretty young.

Cox: Yes, but I went everywhere with them. Everything was done in the name of the family, so everything was discussed at home. But I, at that time, was not particularly concerned with these negotiations, except that I did know that the operation was going to move. It took about a year and a half before we left Oakland. I would say that we left there sometimes between 1931 and 1933.

Dunning: But the Parr lease was signed with Richmond in 1926.

Cox: There were two leases. Let's say that we left Oakland completely in 1930. It was after about a year and a half to two years of talking.

Bringing Ford Motor Company to Richmond

Cox: My uncle again made a contract with the City Council of Richmond that he would bring a major industry to that area of the waterfront. This time he didn't do something foolish, he knew who he was going to get. He heard that the Ford Motor Company was going to put an

Cox: assembly plant out here. There's a little anecdote about how he got the plant. Fred Parr heard that there was going to be a convention of sales managers from all over the United States at the main offices of the Ford Motor Company.

My uncle heard about this salesman's convention, so he boned up a little bit about the old models, and what new models might be coming out, and he went back a week ahead of time. He walked into the executive office--he didn't ask to see anybody. They had a car there out on display, and he spent hours admiring this car, and measuring it, and talking about it, particularly to the secretarial staff. Fred Parr was a very affable and pleasant chap. They asked him where he was from, and he said, "Oh, I'm from the San Francisco Bay Area." He never said who he was or what he was--he didn't leave his name. They got so they'd say, "Oh, Mr. Parr," and he brought them flowers and things, and played around with this car. He could greet people like you cannot believe.

Parenthetically, I remember a time when the Columbia Park boys were gathering around. Jimmy Ross, who was the mayor of San Francisco, and my uncle were put up on the platform, and somebody made a bet that those two men could name every man in the room. The bet was rather substantial for those days, I think three or four hundred dollars--to go to the Park boys. And between Jimmy Ross and himself every man was named. My uncle could remember names.

So he got to know some of the other salesmen walking around there. A new salesman would come in and my uncle would introduce him to everyone. He'd say, "Have you met John Doe from Los Angeles?" Everybody thought he was one of the big sales wheels. My uncle walked right in, and he said, "I've got to see Mr. Ford." "Yes, yes," and he walked right in. He had the plan laid out with that architectural drawing. The

Cox: upshot was that the Ford Motor Company built that beautiful assembly plant right behind what was finished Terminal No. 3 in Richmond.

Change in Legislation to Extend Waterfront Lease

Cox: By getting an industry he assured that the '26 lease was, in all of its ramifications, going to be okay with the city. He did have to go over to Sacramento, and I remember this very well. He'd done a lot of spade work before. The legislature had to agree that it was possible to lease municipal lands for periods up to fifty years. Up to that time I think the maximum lease you could have with a city on harbor property was ten years, anywhere in the state. Because there was a law that prevented municipalities and state agencies from making any longer lease terms. I remember going twice to Sacramento. In those days it was a tedious ride for a young boy, and even more tedious to sit up in the balcony and listen to all these speeches. But I do remember that in a night session it was agreed that cities and state agencies could extend leases to developers for fifty years.

Dunning: This was the very first time it happened?

Cox: Number one. That set the pattern for all up and down the state.

Dunning: What reasons did Fred Parr present to the legislature?

Cox: Because you can't develop a port until you get a combination of shippers to use the port and steamer lines to come and meet the cargos. Nobody's going to leave a situation in which they're presently served if they think it's just going to be a fly-by-night. To set a traffic pattern for international trade is a

Cox: very, very difficult situation. You have to satisfy not only the domestic shipper but also the steamer line. In many cases they've got a foreign shipper or consignee, and on inbound cargos it's the same thing in reverse.

Terminal No. 3

Cox: Fred Parr said it would take many years to develop a port, and everybody agreed that that was probably correct. So in about 1928--I'm not exactly sure--Terminal No. 3 opened its doors. Terminal No. 3 was quite a fine dock. In its day, it was the finest pier in the San Francisco Bay. It was 120 feet wide, and the shed was 800 feet long. The pier structure gave it another 350-odd feet. You could easily berth two big vessels or three small ones. In those days most of the cargo vessels were fairly small--8,000 tons was a big ship.

Terminal No. 2: The Sugar Dock

Cox: Now all this time the city was operating a very very small dock, just abutting Terminal No. 3. That was called Terminal No. 2, and I have an anecdote concerning that.

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Terminal No. 2 was designed to handle inland waterway vessels only. C & H Sugar Company was located up at Crockett, and the Southern Pacific ran right by their door. The Southern Pacific and C & H got into a terrible wrangle about something, so C & H made a deal with Matson to haul the sugar by water down to Richmond,

Cox: where it would be transferred at a particularly well-designed little dock directly from the lighter into boxcars. And, although that was expensive, the Santa Fe seemed to be very happy about that. The operation of that terminal was turned over to us.

Dunning: So Parr Terminal ran the sugar dock?

Cox: Yes. An interesting thing about Terminal No. 3--the city owned the land under the north half of Terminal No. 3, and it was our obligation to buy from private landowners the area comprising the south half of Terminal No. 3 and the land behind Tenth Street on which the Ford Motor Company was located. We floated a bond issue, and we were able to buy the land. There were many problems over titles, which became even worse many years later when World War II started. I'll speak of that when we talk about the shipyards.

Dunning: That'll be down the road a bit.

Cox: But the beginning of this problem arose right at this time.

Dunning: I know there was a 1927 bond issue--would it be at that time?

Cox: That was the bond issue.

Dunning: Okay, and that resulted in the construction of sewers, and the streets, and-

Cox: That was the municipal bond issue. Our company floated a corporate bond issue to have enough money to buy the land that we had to own in order to live up to our side of the agreement. The bond issue was paid off pretty well because the Ford Motor Company bought the land from the city. The bond issue in Richmond extended Tenth Street. It was to be a four-lane road, but there only were two lanes. They ran the sewers down there. The

one that spearheaded the thing the most was a woman on the City Council, Mattie Chandler, who was on and off mayor for several times, and Harry Scott, who was occasionally a mayor. He represented the Standard Oil Company on the City Council.

Opening Day:--Ford Motor Plant

Cox: I remember I attended the opening of the Ford Motor Plant. In attendance were the city attorney, Tom Carlson, the mayor--I can't remember which mayor was on the podium, some people from the Ford Motor Company, Ed Hoffman, the city engineer, my uncle, and some other politicians from the state and county. All the workers were at their places in the factory to assemble cars, and for the purpose of this exhibition they had already assembled a lot of cars, but the first car had yet to come down the ramp into the parking lot. The signal for all the workers to get to work was a siren. The siren was up in the window of the general manager's office on the second floor and a clothesline ran down to the podium. I can remember Tom Carlson picking up the handle and pulling on it, and pulling on it, and pulling on it--and nothing happened, no siren. He pulled, and he pulled, and he pulled.

I remember somebody told a young fellow, "For God's sakes, get the locomotives to blow their whistles," because the Santa Fe and the Southern Pacific both had locomotives there. And pretty soon the whistles blew, and the workers could hear the noise, and down the ramp came a green Model A Ford. Very interesting.

Dunning: That may be the one that's at the Richmond Museum. I know they have a Ford there that was supposed to be the first one off the assembly line. It's been refurbished.

Cox: It may be, if it's a green one. Of course, they might have painted it a different color.

Dunning: That must have been an exciting day.

Cox: Well, it was interesting. All my life I have always been bored with speeches because I received an overdose of speeches as a child. I was taken to everything. Hell, when we opened the dock at Oakland I sat through interminable speeches. Then they put on some entertainment; they had the bands playing, but they also had prize fights up there. That was supposed to be a very manly thing to watch, but it bored the tar out of me. I spent my time walking around on the deck of one of the vessels that was tied up there.

Dunning: What about your brother?

Cox: Oh, he was two and a half years younger. We are very different in personality. He inherited my uncle's ability to negotiate and to calculate. I have a very slight dyslexia, and I can't remember orders of numbers. I also have difficulty in reading, unless I read very slowly, and I still mix up "p"'s and "b"'s and that sort of thing. It's slight, and has not inhibited me much. But I've always loved the operations, I guess from my father taking me around when I was little. My brother followed my uncle; in fact, he changed his name. My brother's name was Fred Van Ness Cox, and he changed his name to Fred Parr Cox--at the urging of my uncle, I think. Anyway, he went the same route as my uncle and very successfully.

Dunning: He also stayed in the family business?

Cox: Well, when I get to that point, which is way down the line, he separates. He's still in the family business but it becomes the second family business.

Dunning: You mentioned about going to hear so many speeches as a child, and it seems like you were practically born in the business--

Cox: I was.

John Parr Cox:--Educational Background

From Pre-Med Student to Longshoreman

Dunning: I'd like to hear something about your own early schooling.

Cox: Only if you have heard what you've heard, does what I did make sense really. I went to school in San Francisco, attended what was then the state normal school and--I now have to boast a little bit--I became one of Dr. Truman's students. I became a "Termite"--that was a colloquialism, of course. Students were given tests, and students who had a reasonably bright future academically were put into classes in Palo Alto, or in San Francisco schools. We were allowed to progress as rapidly as we could. We usually had two or three master teachers in the room, and three or four student teachers in the room all the time. As a result we finished our grammar school work about a year and a half before any of the other classes did. We took an enormous amount of electives.

This carried on until I had to leave, and I went down to the Mexican border for my brother's health. He suffered viciously from sinus trouble. I went to junior high school and high school without any trouble-- [background noise]. They're cutting metal with a saw.

Dunning: That's what they're doing outside?

Cox: Yes, they're building the Olympic Hotel. I'm a member of the Olympic Club and Bohemian Blub. The Olympic Club is right there. I can throw a tennis ball to the club from here.

I attended Roosevelt Junior High School, which is now a middle school. I was with the first class, and I went through with no problems. By special permission I was able to take a lot of electives. I went on to San Jose State College, going to school in the daytime and working on the family's ranch in Palo Alto. I lived there.

While we were building the home I lived for a year and a half in a tent with a dog and took care of the horses. Then I went to San Jose State and took all the courses that were required, and then took electives: a lot of physiology, a lot of anatomy, and a few chemistry courses. I wanted to be a physician. I was accepted into Stanford Medical School, and Dr. J. Morrell George, who had been the professor of endocrinology--this was when the school was in San Francisco--was going to take me under his wing. I even had a job, to take care of the smaller animals, which would pay me enough for tuition and to get through the school.

I was all ready to go. In fact, I attended summer seminars at Dr. George's suggestion. My uncle came out to the barn one day as I was painting the barn and he said, "I hear you're talking about going to medical school." I said, "Yes, I think so." This was the only time that he ever came down on me: he said, "Go ahead! But who's going to take care of your brother and your mother? Because I'm not." And I realized that beneath his jovial exterior was a pretty hard man.

Dunning: Your father was dead?

Cox: Oh, yes, my father died when I was twelve years old.

Cox: Well, I changed careers in about fifteen minutes. I became a longshoreman.

Dunning: He had that much influence over you?

Cox: He had influence over my mother. They didn't have an income at all.

Dunning: He wasn't about to support them.

Cox: No way. He supported me because he knew I would make a good hand on the docks.

Dunning: He just expected that you'd follow in his footsteps?

Cox: Yes. I was a surrogate son. So I said to him, "All right, I'll work on the docks, but I want an extra year in school." That was fine, education was wonderful. He had never gone to college, Heald Business School was the highest he'd ever gone, and he had an awe of people who went to college. He thought that was the opening of a door in some places--and maybe it was.

Anyway, I went up to the College of the Pacific, and I lectured on Astronomy I. I was the only student in the field of the history of Japan. I took oriental philosophy, of course, and I took a course in logic. I made two telescopes while up there, I conducted the night work at the observatory, and taught Astronomy 1-S. I wrote the syllabus for a course in physiology, which was being taught by the then coach of the basketball team. It was required that you attend that, and I attended that and laughed and they sent me out of the room. I went to see the president and I said, "Dr. Knowles, your students in there are being taught by a fool. He may be a great basketball coach, but he is utterly incompetent." He said, "Well, if you're so good, write the syllabus." I said, "I will," and I did.

Cox: It was used for several years, to my knowledge. "The Hygiene of the Mucus Membranes" was the title of it. A very straightforward thing.

I took criminology, and I gave intelligence tests to prisoners in San Quentin and at the San Joaquin County Jail. I took every course that I thought I would never have a chance to take. I took the history of the development of languages, I took ancient Greek--

Dunning: All in a year?

Cox: Because I had finished my college work at San Jose in three and a half years, and since I had always gone to summer sessions, I had special permission to take from twenty-two to twenty-five units. I did reasonably well and didn't have to study very much. Physiology was nothing for me. Anyway I had so many credits when I went up to Pacific that they thought that there was some mistake. They had a transcript of record that was three pages. Hell, I became the zoologist for Pacific. I led two zoological expeditions in Death Valley, and I was a marine zoologist when I was down at San Jose State for Dr. Pickwell. Dr. Earl Wendell Count was the other one. Hell, I've taken every formal basic course in science in everything except botany, because, I figured, I might as well have fun.

Dunning: Did you ever resent your uncle's pressure on you to change your career at that point?

Cox: Well, yes, one can't escape some thoughts, but on the other hand I knew what was in his mind. He was in a very vulnerable situation, and he needed everybody that he could get. I say "vulnerable" because the shipping business was in economic trouble. And I was a giant man. I obtained my present height of virtually six foot five when I was thirteen years old. I had to carry a chair from class to class because the little benches were too small. I have a little card--I still have it

Cox: someplace at home: you used to be able to put a penny in a scale and get a card with a picture of a motion picture actor on the back and then the date on the other side and your weight. On my twelfth birthday I weighed 227 pounds, but it was all muscle. I was incredibly strong, for a young man.

I couldn't play in any sports. I went into the wrestling for fun here at the YMCA and I even defeated the men. That was no fun. I won several certificates and a big belt. In the Bay Area counties I was the champion in the unlimited division. In the contest, I was able to lift 938 pounds on the dead lift, and I was just thirteen. But it was all muscle. Hell, my uncle made me work like a slave down there. I used to have to carry five tons of hay in the morning and five tons of hay at night--bales of hay. I worked on the baler, I worked everywhere. My brother worked too until he was run over by a wagonload of hay, and then he couldn't work. But, because I had studied physiology, they saved money by making me the veterinarian and furrier down there. I learned how to shoe horses.

My schooling showed no pattern that makes any sense. It wasn't supposed to, because I'd decided to take everything I could possibly cram in, and I'm very delighted that I've done so. I was able to become a licensed engineering contractor for heavy engineering work. I'm a licensed building contractor. I have a license to navigate. During the war, I was an emergency pilot, and I've been a mate on a vessel--I've done all kinds of things. I've built most of my own machinery.

Dunning: I was just wondering: you mentioned that you had a slight dyslexia, but it seems like it's mostly in the last ten years that there's been a lot of emphasis on that. Did it even have a name then?

Cox: Oh, yes. I had a teacher named Miss Wolf, who I always thought was long-suffering. Very delightful woman. I was skipping letters. I can explain what dyslexia is in one long sentence. In a recent anecdote in a Reader's Digest this month, a man had a female hound, and he belonged to a hunt club in England. Only male hounds are in hunt clubs, but because he was such a nice gentleman, they decided to let this female run with the hounds. She did so. The pack disappeared. When they were hunting for the pack, they found a farmer. "Did you see the pack go by?" and the farmer says, "Yes. That's the only time I've ever seen a fox running last."

Now, you have to understand that I read this and it didn't make any sense to me, because I did not see the word fox. I saw letters, but I couldn't make out fox, and therefore--I was reading rapidly--the anecdote meant nothing to me. But because it meant nothing I just went back and quickly reviewed it to see which word I'd left out, knowing I'd left a word out. I found "fox" and it was funny. That is the form of dyslexia that I have. I don't see words sometimes. [phone rings] Pardon me. [tape off]

Dunning: While you were at school did you always work in the family business?

Cox: Yes, I worked nights and I worked on Saturdays. My family felt I was too valuable around the cattle, horses, and hogs. But on my thirteenth birthday my uncle took me to one side and said, "From now on you carry your own weight. We'll pay you a man's wages to do men's work." So in my first regular job on the waterfront I acted in a survey gang when we were about to purchase the Point San Pablo land from the Pillsbury estates. I helped run the lines on the right of way, and I earned my first money there. So I worked on the docks occasionally. I worked on the ranches every day except when I went to Pacific, and then I worked quite often on weekends, Saturdays and Sundays, on the docks.

Cox: Particularly under a very famous superintendent that we had, Paul Orloff, who I'll tell you more about when we get to Terminal No. 4, which was the '36 lease.

My schooling was such that I attended every summer session, and every Easter vacation. I have an ungodly amount of college credits. I still attend seminars and lectures at the Children's Hospital, for which, by simply filling out a postcard, I get two units of credit. I've got ten or fifteen of those. I was one of the first people to be introduced to ultrasonic diagnostic work in pregnant women, and I was the only one in a group of three hundred that was able to diagnose triplets. [laughs] I felt rather smug.

Dunning: So you still keep your hand in medicine a little, or certainly your interest?

Cox: I take the New England Journal of Medicine; the Journal of the American Medical Association; I take Nature, which is the most prestigious paper made in general science--it covers all fields; I take Science, which is by the American Association for the Advancement of Science; I take a general circulation magazine called Astronomy; I take the proceedings of the American Astrophysical Association; I take two magazines covering interesting thoughts on geologic processes; and I take a magazine called High Technology. I must take thirty-odd magazines of that nature. I don't read fiction at all, because as a dyslectic, if I lose a word it doesn't mean anything, but I know, in a technical magazine, that if I don't understand a sentence I've missed a word.

Dunning: So you go back.

Cox: Yes. I have no problem, they're very logically written. That's my pleasure. Oh, I buy books sometimes. I have just finished two books on quantum mechanics: one is the Search for Schrodinger's Cat--it's fascinating, you should buy it and read it; and the other is The Dancing

Cox: Wai Li Masters. I've also just finished The Arrow of Time, which I sent to a sick friend of mine. That's what I read.

Dunning: Well, you certainly keep your mind going.

Cox: Use it or lose it.

Anyway, my formal schooling ended with the war, but I've kept up some schooling. I own about two or three thousand books which I'm still in the process of giving to different schools.

Influence of Uncle Fred D. Parr

Dunning: Do you think that Fred Parr had more influence on you than your father?

Cox: Well, he would have to, I lived with him much longer. Even when my father was living with us he was away part of the time. My father had a different kind of influence on me. He had a premonition of his death. I don't say that he was psychic, but when I was ten years old he said, "John, something might happen to me. You may be out with the ladies in a car. I want you to learn to do two things right now, and do them well. I want you to learn to drive a car, and I want you to learn to change a tire." So at ten years I drove a car and changed tires. I became quite competent at that. Mechanical devices have never bothered me much. I've never owned a piece of equipment that I couldn't run, and I've owned everything from a locomotive to caterpillar tractors to jackhammers.

Involvement with Charitable Organizations and the Methodist Church

Cox: My brother, on the other hand, he had a very good financial brain. He was very, very clever. He's done extremely well, to put it mildly. The influence was my uncle. He was an organization person: he loved to organize things and become the chairman. I went exactly the other way. I don't like organizations, I don't like "organized joy," such as in service clubs. I play a musical instrument, several in fact--brass instruments, and I believe the only organization I've ever liked is in a band, where we all do the same thing at the same time, and play for each other's joy.

But I have to give my uncle credit for something. All his life he gave one third of his money and one third of his time to charity. He was for thirty-odd years the president of the Goodwill Industries. He was one of the founding members of the Save the Children group in the west here. He was one of eight men appointed by Herbert Hoover to found the Boy's Clubs of America, and was very, very active on the coast here. You could hardly name a major charitable endeavor that he has not been connected with in one way or another. He was very active in church work.

Dunning: What church would that have been?

Cox: Well, in particular the Methodist Church. He has been called the leading layman in the western division of the Methodist Church. He came in when they were going to build a huge church and hotel down here, I think on MacAllister and something. The building's now occupied by the Internal Revenue Service. It was to be a hotel, but it was designed by a very unthinking person. It was in an awful location, and it was doomed to fail. A number of very fine men lost their entire fortunes, and

Cox: many of them died under the pressures of trying to build this hotel in a period when that was the wrong thing to do.

So he came in there and tried to save things. But even with his ability all he could do was prolong the agony. He was superintendent of Sunday School at the Wesley Methodist Church, for many, many years. I used to resent that, because he used to make me get up and perform by singing and doing other things that I disliked. He thought it was good for me, to teach me to get out with people. All it did was drive me back into a hole.

Entrance into the Port of Richmond

[Date of Interview: June 24, 1986]##

Dunning: During our last session we covered quite a bit about your family history, and also your uncle Fred Parr's going into the Port of Richmond from Oakland. Today I'd like to concentrate on that period, and also on the thirties, the Depression era in Richmond and its effect on the family business.

Cox: The entrance into the Port of Richmond was a major step, of course, for our family, because while we had many stockholders, the majority of the stock was owned by the family, and everybody in the family worked in the company--the adults, anyway. They had desks down at the office at One Drumm Street in San Francisco.

Dunning: Could you give me an idea of who in the family?

Cox: There was my uncle, of course, Fred Parr. There was my aunt, his sister, Pearl Parr, and my mother, Vera Parr Cox. They did everything down there that needed doing. We had bookkeepers and stenographic help, but my mother acted as a secretary, and also ran the PBX board, and my aunt was a bookkeeper and did general clerical work. And of course my uncle was out soliciting business and managing the company. We had a pretty good staff in San Francisco. We still had a staff in Oakland. We were getting ready to close that down, but until we did we maintained a complete terminal office there. We had a fellow named Mossup, who was a general superintendent. We had William Lang, who was the office manager, and we had a very unique little lady, Annie Joseph, who was the widow of Captain A. B. Joseph. She came as a temporary employee and remained with us for about thirty-five years.

Dunning: What was her capacity?

Cox: She was the general factotum in the office who did everything. She signed her letters "A. B." and therefore all the longshoremen began to call her "Abie." In later years, in the turmoil on the waterfront, Abie could walk freely wherever she wanted and nobody gave her any trouble. She was a very tiny woman.

We were getting ready to construct the dock over in Richmond. We constructed the south half of Terminal No. 3, as it was to be known, and the city was to construct the north half. Each building, with a common firewall, was four hundred feet long, and there was a total of sixty thousand square feet in each building. The negotiations that led up to what we call the '26 lease took about a year and a half. As I mentioned, the Ford Motor Company was induced to come out there before the lease was signed with the City of Richmond. I think I mentioned that the State of California was petitioned, and changed the law to give us a chance to get a fifty-year lease.

Cox: For about a year and a half, for, I'd say, three nights a week, my uncle was in Richmond, accompanied by either my aunt or my mother. I came along a good part of the time, and I remember sitting outside in the car being entertained by my grandmother or my aunt or someone while my uncle was talking. The majority of the meetings were held in the office of the Richmond Independent. Sometimes Jim McVittie, who I think was then city manager, was there. And there was Ed Hoffman, the city engineer who was born in Richmond, went to high school there as I recall, and the newspaper editors.

I do remember that it was the newspaper where they met most of the time, because I used to go to the window and watch the linotypes work at night. There was another paper in Point Richmond. I don't remember the name, but they took a sort of an adversarial position. I suppose for the reason of increasing circulation. I don't know any other reason.

Another man that was very active was Edgar Dale, who I think later became affiliated with the chamber of commerce. He was a member of the Elks Club, and later became the general secretary of the Richmond Elks Club. For a while he was one of the directors of our company. There were city councilmen: I met Mattie Chandler, who became mayor, and a fellow named Scott, who was on-and-off mayor down through the years, and councilman for a long time. I cannot exactly remember who represented the legal side of the city, I believe it was Tom Carlson. I don't know if he was at that time or not, but very shortly after he became city attorney, and was for many years. He was a very able attorney.

I remember principally Ed Hoffman, because he worked on the drawings, which always interested me. We had our own engineers, a fellow named Parsons, who was the chief draftsman, and a fellow named James Walsh, who

Cox: was the engineer that had done the piling for the Ferry Building here in San Francisco, a very excellent Marine Engineer.

Dunning: He was hired by Parr Terminals?

Cox: Yes. He worked with Parsons, and together they worked with Ed Hoffman to develop a design of the dock. The remarkable thing about Ed Hoffman's contribution was that we used green piling under the shed itself, and he arranged so that all the rain water from the property behind the dock and from the roof of the dock would go under the shed to keep the green piling wet, because as long as green piling is wet it doesn't rot. In Swiss lakes the Bronze Age dwellings were on piling, and that piling that was under the water is still there.

When the dock was designed, the apron was to be constructed on concrete piling, and my uncle and Jim Walsh conceived of the idea of forming the Pan Pacific Piling Company. They built quite a sizable little factory just north of Terminal No. 2, and they cast the reinforced concrete piling. What they did to make it a little different was that they treated the concrete piling under high pressure in big retorts with creasote--high temperature and high pressure so that the piling was permeated to about three inches. It's noteworthy that in all the years that I've been working with the company we've never had any trouble with that piling, and when it was pulled out to make room for the present container station the piling was still in good shape. This method has never been used elsewhere because it was too expensive, apparently. It wasn't cost effective, and today they make concrete that's better than they used to.

The dock construction went pretty fast. The army engineers were solicited and agreed to dredge the harbor if we could get additional entities there.

Dunning: That was part of the original agreement in the lease.

Cox: Yes. Not only in the lease, but in other agreements. Yes, it was referred to in the lease, but there were letters and other correspondence. My uncle was able to bring in an oil company--I can't remember the name. Richfield sticks in my mind, but that might not be the correct name. I'm going back sixty years almost.

Dunning: What kind of company was it?

Cox: An oil company. Little tankers came in. And with the C & H Sugar being delivered at Terminal No. 2, with the oil company, and with the Ford Motor Company, the army engineers agreed to dredge a channel down to thirty-two feet, Mean Lower Low Water [MLLW], and I can remember the big suction dredges working. The suction dredges pumped the spoils into the area that lies between the east side of the existing inner harbor terminal channel and Fourteenth Street. We made a huge dyke or revetment of large, granite rocks, and the spoils were pumped into this impounding basin. This became the site where the Ford Motor Company was to locate.

As the terminal was being constructed my uncle discovered that the Filice & Perrelli Company was thinking about a cannery site. The F & P brand was a brand specifically designed for export to the European market. So when he offered them a site on Tenth Street, which was just across the street from the proposed terminal, they did accept it. I remember making some trips with my family to Monterey, where one of the members--either one of the Filices or one of the Perrellis--lived, and an agreement was entered into that they would locate behind the dock. They were given the land at virtually a no cost basis, because we anticipated tonnage. We owned the property behind the dock, and we felt that the tonnage over the years would compensate.

Dunning: Did they actually lease it from you, or did they buy it?

Cox: Eventually they bought it. When I say "we," I'm trying to get the point across that almost everything we did was on family consensus. I will use the word "we" in that sense until I become "I factotum" in the picture, and then I use "I". I'm always talking about a participatory endeavor, up until the very last.

When the lease was signed, and the Ford Motor Company was assured, there was quite a little ceremony up at the city hall. When my uncle returned with the agreement from the Ford Motor Company he was met at the train station by the city council. I believe Mattie Chandler was the mayor at that moment. In honor of her and Councilman Scott we named the streets leading to the dock on the north and the south Chandler Avenue, and Scott Avenue. That's where the names come from.

I can recall that after the fill that the army engineers had pumped in had stabilized, and the piling was already driven, the construction proceeded very rapidly. The building that was constructed was the most modern facility on the West Coast at that time. It had an ability to withstand six hundred pounds to a square foot loading, as I recall, which was big in those days. It had twenty feet clearance to the eaves, so you could high pile cargo.

When the building was completed Harbor Day was established in Richmond, and the only parade that I've seen of any size occurred. Among the participants were bands from the schools in the county--I think the University of California band was there too. Every marching unit that could be assembled was marching, and there were different floats and searchlights. The parade went down Macdonald Avenue and ended up at Terminal No. 3, where the City of San Francisco sent over the Sullivan, a big fire boat, and I can remember them making fountains in the searchlights. We had some

barges that were loading beans at the time, that was the only commercial activity at the dock during the celebration. About three or four thousand people eventually ended up at Terminal No. 3, and I remember my brother and myself getting our picture taken by the newspapers, with my uncle in the middle.

Waterfront Activity During the Depression

Cox: The general Depression in the United States at this time was being felt everywhere, but to a certain extent Richmond--I'm speaking of the dock now--escaped the worst of that problem because of several reasons.

The first one was that the Port of Stockton, as well as the Port of Sacramento, had yet to be constructed, and enormous quantities of beans came down from the Lompac Company, and the Sinshimer Brothers, and a number of bean companies. They were barged to vessels, particularly beans going to Puerto Rico and other places in the Caribbean. Some beans went to Europe, but a large quantity to the Caribbean. Filice & Perrelli were beginning to export in quantity the F & P brand fruits.

Furthermore, because of the fire laws in San Francisco, you couldn't store gasoline under San Francisco piers overnight, or for more than twenty hours. So we got gasoline from all of the major refineries in steel drums that was going offshore. We had twenty-one days free time, because the Coast Guard realized that the docks in Richmond were relatively isolated from major centers of population.

Cox: As I recall in those days there weren't more than eighteen or twenty thousand people in Richmond. It was more or less an agricultural community except for the Pullman shops, Standard Sanitary, and the Standard Oil Company. There were some other little companies, but those were the big employers. The Pullman shops employed a lot of people. Standard Oil, of course, was going twenty-four hours a day. In those days the Long Wharf was wooden, and the Point Orient wharf had two sheds on it, as well as being a tanker dock. We were kept fairly busy. We didn't know it, but we were in the twilight of the general cargo era, as far as shipping commodities in cases, bags, barrels, and drums. Containers had not yet appeared.

Dunning: Basically, in the Inner Harbor, it was just the Ford Company and Filice & Perrelli?

Cox: That's correct, at that time.

Dunning: And the Ford Company was the only new major business between 1930 almost until 1940?

Cox: Well, no. My uncle brought in some other companies, The NAPCO people--National Oil Products. I think they came just before the war, but I'm not certain of all this, the memory plays tricks.

Dunning: In the reading I've done only Ford Motor would be mentioned in the 1930s as a major concern.

Cox: Yes. You see, there were little companies--Captain Lauritzen had his little navigation and improvement company up at the head of the Lauritzen Canal. There was a shrimp operation up in that area, and there was a yacht building operation up at the head of the Santa Fe Channel. There was an operation of marine salvage that had hard-hat divers. There were a couple of little restaurants catering to the industrial people around there. But it was pretty barren.

Description of Early Richmond, A Small Industrial Town

Dunning: I would like to hear your description of what the harbor looked like from your first recollections.

Cox: You mean after Terminal No. 3 was built?

Dunning: I'd like to go back as far as you remember, even before Terminal No. 3 was built.

Cox: All right. I remember going out in a boat, and going right over the land where Terminal No. 3 was--Terminal No. 2 was already constructed. I was allowed to ride in a boat with a little motor, and we were looking at the area that was to be developed. There were a number of small farms in the region. People would have a couple of cows and a windmill, and maybe a half acre of corn, or something like that. Lots of water was pumped by windmill in that area. I can recall at least eight or ten right in the area between Tenth Street and up where the Stauffer Chemical Company is.

There were little farms where individuals raised chickens and things. They were very, very sparse. The roads weren't paved. It was quite a rural setting, quite bucolic, and very sparse. Of course up far to the east, by San Pablo Avenue, was the Stauffer Chemical Company, particularly making sulfur products--sulfuric acid. A quite large grove of eucalyptus trees hid that plant pretty much from general view. The city hall was just a square building that stuck out on Macdonald Avenue like a sore thumb, all alone. There were merchants on Macdonald Avenue, and the Carquinez Hotel had been constructed, but Richmond was just like a very, very small industrial town. It was not crowded at all. There were tremendous vacant areas between all the buildings.

Cox: Right in the heart of Richmond it was like a little town, but the minute you got two blocks off of Macdonald Avenue, why, you wander into the country. There were lots of farm horses, working horses. Some people raised hay, particularly in the north side of Richmond. Richmond had one disadvantage: the railroad tracks for the Southern Pacific and the railroad tracks for the Santa Fe cut Richmond into sort of a pie-shaped city, with the exception of Point Richmond.

Point Richmond

Cox: Point Richmond was cut off by the railroad tracks. Santa Fe was one of the big industries there. Santa Fe had its western terminus, its repair shops, and its car floats out at Point Richmond. The community of Point Richmond is, I guess, the oldest part of Richmond. A number of men who worked for us in the warehousing end of the business lived in Point Richmond, principally Italians, as I recall: Tony Turkovitch, and people like that, old-timers.

Point Richmond had the finest climate in the Bay Area, without any question. In fact, on the south side of Point Richmond, where there were very few homes, there was a large nudist camp there.

Dunning: Oh, really? I've never heard that.

Cox: There was, for many years. Oh, the climate's beautiful there. We made a study, years later, to build an airport in Richmond, and we discovered that if we could build it in Point Richmond, that was where there were the most fog-free days in the San Francisco area.

Fog comes in the gate, hits Berkeley, spreads north and south, goes along the line of the hills, and Point

Cox: Richmond is the last to be closed in--usually. Not every time, of course. The tule fogs come down the river, but generally speaking the climate is very salubrious. In fact in those days there was an eccentric gardener who had tropical plants and trees. I was taken there as a visitor one time. He died about 1938 or so, but he had quite an extensive tropical garden. A lot of it was put under glass houses, but there were beautiful little trees.

Dunning: Where exactly was the nudist camp?

Cox: Down by the water. There's a lot of eucalyptus trees as you stand on the top of the Point Richmond hills and look down towards the water. I can't locate it exactly, except that the eucalyptus trees, I think, are still there, a good many of them.

Dunning: Probably up on Western Drive.

Cox: It's down right by the waterfront, right on the water. They had high fences, but everybody knew it was a nudist camp, and I had seen it from a boat where I was going fishing. That was quite a daring thing, to see these people running around. But it's always been kind of a haven for people that are rather relaxed in their attitudes, even today.

Dunning: It's an eclectic community.

Cox: Somewhat. The situation was tolerated by everybody. In fact, I think some people thought it was kind of fun to have such an exotic place in the community.

Terminal No. 1

Cox: The ferry boat that left Point Richmond took a forty minute run to San Francisco. There was quite a nice little restaurant down there. Terminal No. 1 had already been built, and we were able to use that during '29 and the thirties for the handling of beans even before Terminal No. 3 was constructed. There were beans going outbound and steel from Bethlehem Steel, cold-rolled coils coming inbound, I recall. I've a pretty good memory of that because my family felt I should be acquainted with the business, and they gave me a notebook and made me inventory the dock every time I went over there in order to learn how to count and identify cargo and identify shipping marks.

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Dunning: So you would get to know where the cargo was coming from, and where it was going?

Cox: Yes.

Dunning: That's quite a learning experience.

Cox: Oh, yes, sure. I went to work full-time Saturdays and many Sundays and some holidays as a clerk. I started on my twelfth birthday. I was big fellow.

Dunning: You mentioned you were six foot two by your twelfth birthday.

Cox: Yes, I was a big boy. And I never talked much to anybody, I just did my work.

Dunning: So your major work was doing inventory?

Cox: What they used to call it was "clerk"--it was the union classification of clerk. I did that kind of work. Later, when there would be one car of, say, asphalt coming in drums, they would ask me to unload the car. I learned how as I'd seen the men do it, and I knew how to handle the equipment, and I was strong enough. I learned the business all right. Terminal No. 1 had an overhead crane that was used to handle the cold-roll sheets of Bethlehem steel when they were shipping. Before they moved their terminal to San Francisco, Bethlehem Steel owned the Calmar Line, and the Calmar people made regular calls at Richmond.

Rheem Manufacturing Company

Cox: One of the reasons they came to Richmond was because of the Rheem Manufacturing Company that made steel drums for Standard Oil and for other oil companies. I met members of the Rheem family a number of times. Even as a young boy, I went to dinner at their home and they came to our home. During the war they were to make shell casings, but up to that time they made mostly barrels, drums, and hot water heaters, as I recall.

Standard Sanitary

Cox: Standard Sanitary, operating way out in North Richmond, made all sorts of bathroom fixtures, cast them out of steel, or maybe they received them already cast in steel, but there was the place where they put the enamel on them. They made them redhot and then threw shovels full of silica on the redhot material, and it fused and became a bathroom fixture. There was a brass company, too, that made valves.

Dunning: Was that in North Richmond?

Cox: Yes. It was quite a big brass company.

We made a habit of taking regular aerial photographs of the area over the years. The pictures from those days are rather sparse. I may have some over there, if you'd like to look at them.

Dunning: Yes. [tape off] Before we looked at the pictures you were telling me about your first job doing inventory.

Cox: From that, I learned who shipped the cargo, where it went, how it was packaged, how to recognize damaged cartons of cargo before it was laid on the docks. I could make an over, short, and damage report [OS+D], and I learned something about the art of cooperage, how to repair barrels that were leaking. It was a custom in those days, whenever they shipped anything in barrels in any quantity, to ship a couple of extra barrels to make up for "leakers." We had a regular charge in our tariff for re Coopering.

John Parr Cox:--Groomed for the Family Business

Dunning: Did you get paid by your uncle?

Cox: Yes, fifty cents an hour.

Dunning: Which was pretty good.

Cox: Very good, damn right. And besides I had an income from hogs and cattle that I raised myself. I did pretty well for a young fellow.

Dunning: Did you have other friends in that area?

Cox: You mean young friends?

Dunning: Yes.

Cox: No. My brother was never interested in the waterfront. He followed my uncle's footsteps and went into the industrial development end. You see, my uncle never really was a port man, except to use the docks as a magnet to attract industry, and that's why we had over a thousand acres in Richmond at one time. The purpose was to make land attractive for industries, so that he could bring in these different companies, sell his land, and produce revenue for the port. But he kept the port charges down as low as he could in order to make it attractive to industry, and that theory worked pretty well. It's still in the theory of all the ports, up and down the Pacific coast anyway, that you attract industry that will feed cargo into your docks. That's what he and the family did very successfully. My brother particularly followed in his footsteps and became a real estate genius and developer.

But I was big, and they were going to groom me for the waterfront regardless, so that's where I ended up. I've done everything in the company. I've been watchman to president of the company, but one thing I've never done is be a bookkeeper, because I'm dyslexic a little bit and I transpose numbers. But I've done everything, there's no job on the waterfront I cannot do, and I've never owned a piece of equipment that I couldn't run. I made it a point to learn even steam locomotives.

So I had an interesting time. I was trained by very good men. In those days, when Terminal No. 3 was first built, over from Oakland came Mr. Charles Engel, who was a superintendent, long passed away. He was a very hard man to work for, but in the end that turned out to be to my benefit.

Dunning: What was his position with the company?

Cox: He was the operating manager. There was a fellow named Sam McKinstry, who was assistant operating manager. There were a whole string of people that taught me the trade. It's now, of course, obsolete because everything's containers, but at least I knew that business very well. I could load ships, I knew how to figure the metacenter to make a ship seaworthy when it's fully laden.

Dunning: In that early period, in the thirties, about how many people were employed by Parr Terminals?

Cox: Well, in the San Francisco office--and remember that that was also a big real estate operation--there were about ten or twelve average in those days. On the dock of Terminal No. 1 there were about three, and at Terminal No. 3 there were about ten. Now, that was the regular staff. Remember that we were supplemented by ship clerks from the union, some of whom were there for years. I'm not including the watchmen in this--we had 'round the clock watchmen--I'm just talking about the office staff. Everything on the waterfront, on the floor of the dock, was union.

1934 Waterfront Strike

Dunning: Was that right from the beginning?

Cox: Oh, yes, it sure was. I remember very well the 1934 strike. We were unionized before that. We used longshoremen and warehousemen, but the '34 strike was a very bitter one, particularly in San Francisco. We didn't own ships at that time, we'd given up our ships, so we were not affected as drastically as the steamship lines, but people always complained that Harry Bridges destroyed the waterfront. I don't agree. It takes two to tango.

Cox: Please remember that in those days the old ship operators were either dead or retired, and they had employee managers to take over who had no financial stake in the company. The managers had very little, if anything, to lose. I will concede that the union made great advances, but I also have to say that the shipowners were poorly represented. Our company was very well treated by the union, I have to say that.

Dunning: Why do you think that is?

Cox: Well, because [laughs] we got along with them. I mean, it was not an adversarial position all the time.

Dunning: You said that you had recollections of the '34 strike. Are there any that you care to record, any strong ones?

Cox: I want to record that it was bitter, very bitter. A couple of men were shot, the national guard was brought in to San Francisco. We were shut down, but so was everybody else. We were never really bothered by anybody. We didn't try to wave a red flag, always believing that the best battle is the one you run away from and wait until you can sit down, calm down, and talk reasonably. I personally got along very well with the unions when I took over, I have to say that. Not through any magical charm on my part, it's just simply that I knew the men, particularly our Operating Engineers. Very fine men. I always secretly felt that they were underpaid for the fantastically important work they did.

Of course, after the '34 strike the longshoremen were pretty bitter, and they engaged almost everywhere in illegal slowdowns. I recall that very well. I remember a giant of a man--I'm talking now about, say, 1936--a man about seven feet tall, a powerful man. We were loading asphalt drums into a ship, and you know you roll them from the pile over to the ship's hook. This man would put four or five drums on the ground and then

Cox: give them a gigantic kick, push four or five over to the hook at one time. The steward came over and said to him, "Look, Charley, I don't want you to do that. You're giving the wrong impression to the rest of the men." And Charley said, "My feet hurt, and I'd rather sit down rather than walk back and forth." "No, you've got to push one at a time."

Then there was all kinds of little things that always occur after a big labor dispute. It's gradually softened. It was, if you want to use the term, a rather leftist group that began to take over--the vocal parts of the union, anyway. I'll come to that during the war period. That was interesting.

Dunning: Was there any unrest during the period of the thirties in Richmond specifically?

Cox: Not really, no. If the waterfront closed down, we closed because we didn't get any ships. I remember the '37 strike very well, it was minor. In fact, we worked out a pretty decent rapprochement with the longshoremen. In the later years we used to put picnic tables out in front of the dock and run electric current out there, and they'd put up their beach umbrellas, and every morning I'd give them beer and steaks for their barbecues.

Anyway, we got along very well. They never stopped any trains coming into our place, and I never knew of any trucks stopped coming in, because the longshoremen knew we weren't going to load ships--there were no ships! So they ate hotdogs and listened to the ballgame, and got along fine.

Additional Information on the Filice and Perrelli
Canning Company

Dunning: I'd like to go back a little bit to the Filice and Perrelli cannery and get some more of your memories.

Cox: Sure.

Dunning: I did interview Joe Perrelli, who is the last surviving founder, and he talked about your uncle Fred Parr and his super salesmanship--

Cox: He was a super salesman!

Dunning: And he said he had an incredible personality.

Cox: Yes.

Dunning: But he also talked about the day that they came from Oakland. The Filice and Perrelli families were thinking of starting their cannery in Oakland. They had four or five acres, but they didn't scratch the ground, he said.

Cox: No, we traded land with him, I believe.

Dunning: In his interview, Mr. Perrelli said: "As soon as Fred Parr contacted us we recognized what we thought were the advantages of coming to Richmond, so we talked about coming over with Gennaro."

Cox: Gennaro was really, as I recall, the power in that company.

Dunning: He came over to the Richmond site with Gennaro, and he said that they were pretty naive, because, while they knew it was landfill pumped in from the bottom of the bay, they didn't realize how soft it was. Mr. Perrelli said: "We looked at it, and as you walked on this plant site your foot slipped back, because it was nothing but

Dunning: creamy mud. But after we got through looking at it, Gennaro said, what do you think of it Joe?" And Joe said, "It takes a lot of courage to come here."

Cox: That's right. Oh, yes, it takes years. Of course, it dries and hardens from the top down. Five and six feet down it will never harden--not in the lifetime of an average human.

Dunning: Yes. But I got the impression from Mr. Perrelli that they were pretty much on their own.

Cox: They were, everyone, I'm sure--. They built a pretty good plant. They put piling under the heavy equipment.

Dunning: He said the Southern Pacific put in a spur.

Cox: Yes. The Southern Pacific lost a locomotive there.

Dunning: That's one of the things he said. Do you recall that?

Cox: Sure. I went over there the following day to look for the engine. They brought in what the railroads call "the big hook." They brought it down from the Sacramento shops. They were afraid to bring the big hook up to where the locomotive was, as the land looked very soft. They could see part of it the next morning, and by that afternoon there was nothing but a puddle of standing water. We went around with steel reinforcing rods trying to poke at it, and we found it down about fifteen feet, so we just left it there. We didn't try to salvage it. We couldn't get it for the scrap iron.

Oh, yes, I remember that very well. In fact, when I went over in the morning--I heard that the locomotive turned over and I went over there--there was oil and such spill all around. You could see a little part of the cab, a foot or so. By that afternoon it was

Cox: completely gone. The track in that area had been hastily ballasted, and the ballast was far too narrow. At least that was my opinion.

When I put in tracks--and I put in a lot of them for the Parr Terminal Railroad--I always put the ties very close together, and I spread the ballast maybe thirty or forty percent more than normal to spread the weight. Oh, yes, I remember the locomotive turning over. That was by the Seaver Avenue yard of the Southern Pacific, and that was the only place where there was a bad spur in my opinion. The Southern Pacific had put in very good tracks everywhere else--the Southern Pacific and Santa Fe, there was joint service. That was one of the reasons that we were able to get companies to locate there, because we induced both railroads to give us joint service to the docks.

We had to extend the switching zone from the docks way up to North Richmond. So that if you were in the first switching zone, the rate to move a car from the plant down to the dock was very low. All of the Filice and Perrelli material that came to the dock came by truck, because they were just across the street.

Dunning: I've been inside the old cannery building. They'd load up right in the back, and then just drive right over?

Cox: Yes. They weren't big trucks in those days. They'd carry about eight, ten tons. Of course, they weren't palletized, the pallets hadn't been invented, and fork lifts hadn't been invented. But they'd load them by hand, and then they'd be discharged into piles on the dock.

Everything was by hand, nothing was transported by fork lift. There were what they called jitneys, electric or gasoline jitneys, that hauled four-wheelers. Four-wheelers were little tractors that you'd hitch on a string of trailers. These four-wheelers were called

Cox: jitneys. You loaded the trailers by hand with case goods or whatever and haul them to the truck for reloading or across the street to the dock a shipside. Of, if you had steel products, like steel beams, you'd have three or four trailers with a block on the first trailer and a block on the last, and put a forty foot beam on that and take it to the ship, or away from the ship. Stevedoring gear was, by today's standards, extremely primitive.

For Standard Oil, for Associated Oil, for Shell Oil Company we unloaded everything by handtruck out of the railroad car. Or, if they were double-decked, we'd put big oaken skids with brass runners that wouldn't make sparks, tip the drum out of the car onto the skid, and shoot it on the skid. You'd have a man at the bottom to turn it so it could be slowed down, rolled and pointed to the pile. Then you'd have a man with a particular device lift the barrel up on its end. He'd make the first layer of drums, then he'd bring in another car that was double-decked, and you'd shoot those out onto the tier you'd already made, and you could double-deck drums very easily. Now, of course, virtually nothing except specialty products comes in drums anymore. Tetraethyl lead that they use for gasoline still does, I believe. Those drums weigh over a thousand pounds.

Dunning: Do you recall many industrial accidents during that time?

Cox: On the docks?

Dunning: It just seems that, with all that hand labor and heavy lifting, there would be hazards.

Cox: Well, the men that worked there knew how to do it, number one. I was the veterinarian for the company, for emergency patching up of people, and they'd get splinters, mostly, from dunnage. The biggest hazard was splinters. Dunnage is the lumber they lay between the

Cox: piles of cargo in a vessel, between the layers of cargo. Men didn't wear gloves. In later years we provided gloves, but the longshore company usually did not. See, we had the dock, and we had the cargo. The ship would book cargo to go to, let's say, Australia--Union Steamship. Union Steamship had a contract with a San Francisco-based stevedoring company. They'd bring over their own longshoremen, with their own equipment, and they'd take the cargo from the pile, bring it to the side of the ship, and put it in the ship. Many of the stevedoring companies didn't furnish gloves--the men had to buy their own gloves. I took out many, many hundreds of splinters.

In my knowledge, on the docks we only had one man die, and that was heart failure, I think. He was bringing in the lines from a ship with a couple of other men and he just fell over dead. We have been singularly fortunate in this regard. In later years, when we handled bulk cargo we had one man lose a hand, and a number of people that were injured with scrap iron splinters or cuts. I'm thinking of two injuries that I can remember that were fairly serious, but we have been pretty lucky.

But in those days, in the early days, the injuries were more or less confined to the ship itself. For instance, as you were laying dunnage over the barrels, which were set up on end, or drums, a man would put his foot down between the barrels and scrape his calf and thigh pretty much. That was about the worst injury. That wasn't our responsibility, it was the responsibility of the stevedoring company, but I had the big first aid kits on the docks, and they'd come to me and I'd patch them up as much as I could.

Dunning: Anything else you remember about the Perrellis?

Cox: Yes. I went to dinner at their house in Monterey, and boy, did they serve us a--it was the Perrellis or the Filices, I can't remember. Boy, what a dinner.

Dunning: It may have been the Filices, because I know the Perrellis were coming from Gilroy and San Jose.

Cox: It might have been, I don't know. Remember, I was quite young. But I remember the fantastic dinner we had down there.

I didn't deal with them particularly. My work was clerical and on the dock. I got to know the truck drivers. I didn't claim to know the executives except by sight. It was only in later years that I would meet them myself. I remember going in there when the canneries were working and seeing all the women packing cans. That was a big enterprise then. As a cannery went in those days it was quite modern and quite efficient. I later learned how efficient it was when we owned our own canneries. We had one plant where we had 250 tuna queens on the line at one time, down in southern California. But Filice & Perrelli ran a good plant, and the product was good, too.

Dunning: That's what I've heard. Because they started out with their core group of people that they brought up from Gilroy.

Cox: Yes, that's right. Well, you see, the fruit market--and it was mostly fruits they handled--was moving north, north, north, north. The Santa Clara County was being rapidly turned into developments of different kinds, and people were tearing out orchards because of the labor shortage. You relied on Stockton and the areas around Sacramento for peaches, and pears in the north, and that sort of thing. In Santa Clara County pears were at about their last gasp, and prunes went before that. So as the canneries went in San Jose, so did Filice and Perrelli. Oh, we handled a lot of canned goods from San

Cox: Jose on the docks. And a lot of wine going to the East Coast, as well as the Ford automobiles. We also handled tremendous cargoes--loads of dried fruit and beans, as well as petroleum products.

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Henry Ford conceived of the idea of having his own ships and a steamship line, and he thought the plant in Richmond was ideal because he could build a dock, and he did build a dock. I'll never forget: I went over to the pier, and the first Ford ship came in, with "Ford" on the funnel, just like a legitimate steamship line. What she carried was manufacture parts on the East Coast, and they brought them by ship though the canal to be assembled. The plant in Richmond was an assembly plant, pure and simple. They thought they could make a big saving.

I don't remember exactly, but I don't think there were more than four or five Henry Ford ships that called at their Richmond Dock. A few barges called to bring parts from San Francisco, but the wharfinger operation there rapidly disappeared--I think within one year, actually. I'm not sure of this, but certainly, give or take six months either way, I never saw a Ford ship again.

Dunning: What would be your explanation?

Cox: Well, it's a hell of a lot simpler to put the product where it was made in railcars and ship it from the East Coast rather than put it in railcars, ship it to the East Coast, load it aboard a ship, bring it to the Canal, pay the tolls, pay the steamer line, pay the longshoremen to discharge it--when you could put it in a railcar right at the plant and, bang, right across the United States. That was the reason, pure and simple. He ran his own ship, but if he'd chartered vessels it would

Cox: have been smarter, because the ship operator knows how to operate a ship as inexpensively as possible because he's in competition.

Dunning: Did you ever get to know Henry Ford?

Cox: No. I saw Henry Ford, and I saw a couple of the other Fords come out to the plant. I don't think Henry came out for the celebration, but his son did. I met Henry Ford with my uncle--I mean, I didn't meet him, that's erroneous; my uncle talked to him, and I stood deferentially in the background. My role was to be on the waterfront, all the time.

Yes, that was a nice operation, that Ford plant. I knew Clarence Bulwinkle, the general manager of the Ford plant until it closed.

Dunning: Was he the manager from the beginning?

Cox: Not from the very beginning. He came in there and was one of the people in the office, but very shortly became the manager. He was, I think, a very competent man.

Dunning: Was he a local person?

Cox: I don't believe so.

Dunning: He was brought in.

Cox: I believe so.

That was a tremendous thing, in those days. That assembly plant was one of the blue ribbons of the automobile industry. But the building that is now occupied by the University of California people was built specifically for that operation.

Building on Sand Fill and Mud

Dunning: It's really a beautiful building.

Cox: It's attractive, but industrially it's the "Bunker Hill," and I'll tell you why. They put piling only under where there was heavy machinery, and the rest is sand fill on top of the mud. Over the years the mud dewatered a little bit and dropped away. I've been under that building when we were thinking of buying it. There was an average of five feet of void between the floor and where the sand was. I've estimated that the average weight of the floor--and I'm not the only one, there are other engineers that looked at it--I figured 250 pounds maximum per square foot. Well, you can't run a fork truck with a big load. You could run an empty fork truck or little fork lifts, but a big fork lift would punch through. The only place that's really heavy is the old machine shop out on the waterfront.

Dunning: Towards the end.

Cox: Yes, to the south end of the building. That's heavy, that can handle 800 or 900 pounds per square foot with no trouble, but the rest of the building is a beautiful shell. It's good for what they're doing now. It had nice lawns, and the Ford Motor Company kept the grounds up beautifully.

Richmond Industries Open During the Depression

Dunning: I heard that during the Depression the Ford plant never closed down, that people would go on shifts and maybe work three days a week instead of five.

Cox: That's correct. They never did run twenty-four hour shifts that I can remember. They might have in their first days. No, they'd run eight-hour shifts, but they did, during the early days, run sometimes a three-day week.

Yes, [during the Depression] the plant was always open--so was Filice & Perrelli always open. Oh, they had a few cannery strikes, and that sort of thing, but generally speaking they were always open. Standard Oil was always open twenty-four hours a day. Stauffer ran twenty-four hours, and Pullman ran five days. All the other plants that I can recall had five-day weeks. A few of the plants, like, I think, Standard Sanitary during the worst part of the Depression, closed for one week a month or something. I'm not sure of this.

Dunning: Joe Perrelli was telling me how difficult it was during the Depression because there'd be lines of perhaps a hundred women at the gate every morning, and they would stay there three or four hours and then finally leave if they couldn't get work.

Cox: That's right.

Dunning: He said often the family wouldn't take salaries at that time.

Cox: That's right. Well, everyone did that. That's when the ladies in our company in my family were working at no salary. Sure, everybody did that. I can remember on the waterfront during that period there was a woman called "The Angel of the Waterfront." She opened up a soup kitchen, and I remember the long lines of men waiting to get in there. It was very much the forerunner of St. Anthony's Kitchen.

Dunning: Was that in San Francisco?

Cox: Yes. There were people selling apples on the street. It was miserable.

I remember I was carrying some bean samples on California Street, and I heard a noise as people began to run, and I looked over and somebody had jumped out of the fifth or sixth story window and landed on an automobile, and what I heard was the smash of the car. Oh, yes, that was a rough time.

Dunning: I heard one story from an old-time Richmond resident who was a young boy during the Depression, who remembered going on Cutting Boulevard and stealing dried shrimp from the Chinese shrimpers. Then he'd race home, and his mother would use them in the dinner.

Pilferage on the Docks, 1930s

Cox: We had tremendous pilferage on our docks. We had to put in a great many more security people. On Sunday, if there was no ship or no cargo, we used to put down the steel doors--we had big rolling steel doors down tight. By God, on Monday there would be canned goods missing. This would be particularly with Filice & Perrelli. We could not figure out how they got in.

I remember about 1930, I went over there on a Saturday to work, counting some tags in the office with our then superintendent Paul Orloff. We were up in the Terminal No. 3 office. Terminal No. 3 had a two-story office, we could look out into the shed from the second floor. And I heard Orloff say to me, "Come here, I want to show you something." He said, "look at that manhole." There was a manhole--so help me God, it wasn't fourteen inches in diameter, it was a drain. You saw that thing begin to bob up and down, and a very, very slender little boy came out, went into the pile of

Cox: canned goods. We watched to see what would happen, and he cut the cases and began to throw the canned goods down into the hole. Apparently some adult was down there to receive the canned goods.

I remember Orloff phoned the police. They went to the home and they found several thousand cans of the Filice & Perrelli commodities. "Oh, I bought every one!" Well, F & P didn't sell retail in stores in those days. How he could squeeze through this tiny aperture! He was a very young boy, but quite slender and slight. Obviously somebody told him what to do. Pilferage in those days was one of our big problems. In the ships unloaded by the longshoremen, we used to ship the right-hand shoes in one ship and the left-hand shoes in another, because if you had a pair there'd be pilferage for sure.

Dunning: That must have gotten a little complicated.

Cox: I wanted you to know that that's the reason that the containers became so popular. You could weld them shut if necessary. I can tell you some stories about that during the war. There was incredible pilferage.

Dunning: You mentioned that your family called the Richmond Police at that time. I was wondering if you have any memories of the police, or what your connection to them was.

Cox: We had no connection to them.

Dunning: Were they supportive of you, or--?

Cox: We always felt that the police did a good job, at least as far as we were concerned. We had so many regulatory agencies that were involved. The Coast Guard, for instance, was one of the maritime police agencies that we could call on. I've always had a warm spot for the Coast Guard. The Richmond Police, you'd call them and

Cox: they would be very prompt. We let the fire department come down and practice pumping water out of the bay and using their equipment. At Terminals No. 1 and 3 we had virtually no fires that I can recall, outside of maybe a wastebasket fire that we just put out with Dixie cups of water. But at Terminal No. 4 we had a couple of fires. Again, they were small ones--cigarettes thrown between wooden decking, or something. A smouldering fire.

The fire department used to come down regularly and inspect our hoses and the access to the hose. We always got along very well with all of the departments in the City of Richmond: the engineering department, the city clerk's office--everybody. At least, that was my impression.

Loss of Parr Terminal Records

Dunning: Do you think the city clerk's office would have most of the records from all the leases?

Cox: I don't know what they have and what they don't have. Archivally they might have something.

Dunning: But then again, they may not.

Cox: I don't know. I don't think I have copies anymore of either the '26 or the '36 lease.

Dunning: I've seen portions of it.

Cox: We had the leases tested in court, an action for declaratory relief, which we brought and won.

I literally grew up on the waterfront. My first baby picture, that I mentioned, was on Pier 7 when we sent the John B. Stetson north. I was in my

Cox: grandmother's arms, three weeks of age. The San Francisco Call had a front-page picture. All our scrapbooks are gone, except for maybe one or two years here. Everything was just thrown away. My wife was ill, and I was home most of the time, and--

Dunning: People just didn't see any value, or--?

Cox: They didn't know, that's right. They took literally truckloads, the Richmond Sanitary people sent down big dumpsters. If you can imagine every room on this side of the floor of the building filled with filecases--all gone.

Dunning: That must have made you ill.

Cox: I was disappointed. A lot of the documents were original, a lot of things I'd collected, and there was a great deal of history of the family's attempts to engage in business in different places, and of the business we had engaged in. There were items from an abortive attempt to mine coal in Alaska, and bring salt out of Mexico, and things like that. A lot of old glass plates--in the old days when they didn't have film they had plates. It's all gone.

I went out to the dump shortly afterwards to see if I could see anything, but I couldn't. But I'll tell you, you can become a victim of possessions, too. You can have too much. All of my manuscripts, including original translation of Japanese poetry, were destroyed.

Dunning: It probably would have taken you twenty years to catalogue most of your documents.

Cox: Well, I had my material pretty well marked, but I had four or five secretaries within a year and a half period, and when they were cleaning out, they just didn't identify anything. I was attending my very sick wife on an almost twenty-four hour basis and everything

Cox: was cleared out in about two or three days. The only thing I have left are the minute books of the company and some of the old ledgers.

Dunning: You mentioned last time that the ledgers are at the lawyers.

Cox: Yes. I don't know what I could get out of them that would be useful here. I might find something if I went through them that would jog my memory. Dates would be more important.

Change in Land Transportation:--From Rail to Trucks

Cox: But I remember the waterfront when it was a busy and interesting place. If a ship came in that could carry three thousand tons burden, there was a good cargo. Today three thousand tons wouldn't fill the lower hold on one of these big ships. The bay was just filled with dry cargo lighters and liquid tank barges, and there must have been fifty tugboats in the bay and the river. I can recall when the river lines were really the river lines, and they'd have these great long barges. I remember seeing new automobiles going up the river, going to Stockton, Sacramento, and other places, and bringing back beans, grain, and packaged goods in small ships.

Then, about 1930 was a break point in the transportation system of the Pacific coast, as far as the waterfront is concerned. Up to that time the most important facility for land transportation was the railroad. I would say that when we first opened Terminals No. 3 and No. 1, ninety-five percent of material came by rail car. Within five years it was just the reverse. Trucks took over, trucks became larger. The semi-truck and a set of doubles was

developed. The fork lifts and pallets made trucking efficient. But the real changes started in about the very early thirties. The automobile tax law changed and put the solid tire trucks out of business and pneumatic tires took over, so a few years later the development of the highway system and the improvement in trucks actually made trucking an easier way to handle freight than by rail car.

The only freight that survived on the rail cars in quantity was cargo that moved in bulk--scrap iron, coal, iron ore, sulfur--that sort of thing. They'd pack it into gondola rail cars and you would unload it with big equipment. Or liquid in tanks. I remember when a three thousand gallon tank car was a big car. Today that would be "amateur night." Now they have huge tank cars that are almost five or ten times that size. We used to put between twenty-five and twenty-eight tons of fish meal in a box car. Today that would just fill one end.

On bulk cargo you move everything with large capacity equipment; on liquid you just pump it in and out. Fork trucks have reduced the labor of palletized material, but still a box car is not an efficient way to handle commodities if you can possibly put it on a truck economically.

We went through this, and also we went through the change in the size of ships. When we opened the Port of Richmond a vessel would call for three hundred tons of cargo. It would go all the way from San Francisco to Richmond, pick up three hundred tons, and come back and finish loading. In a couple of years that minimum was raised to five hundred tons, and a vessel wouldn't call. What they'd send over would be a barge. The vessel would absorb the transfer costs of the barge or lighter. In later years the vessels wouldn't book merchandise at all if it was coming to Richmond or one of the outports. That's when the general cargo business at Richmond almost literally disappeared.

Dunning: What years are you referring to?

Cox: After the war. There had been these different periods in which the mode of transportation on the land changed, the mode of transportation on the water changed, and the effect on general cargo--for which our facilities were set up--was very, very severe. That's why Parr-Richmond Terminal took over part of one of the shipyards from my brother's company. He owned all of Shipyard One which he leased to Cotton Warehouse Companies, Baker Coconut Cake Mix Company, a luggage manufacturer, a D.D.T. grinding plant, a fire grate manufacturing company, a liquid fish fertilizer company and other small companies. When we took over the south region of the old shipyard we handled 1,700,000 tons of iron ore and over 1,000,000 tons of scrap. Later, companies like Levin Metals and Schnitzer loaded forty or fifty ships at our dock in Richmond. The dock area we leased from my brother's company, the Parr Industrial Company.

The Fishing Ghio Brothers

Dunning: Last week we both mentioned that we knew the Ghio brothers. You know Angie and I know Dominic.

Cox: Well, I've met Dominic too, but I don't know enough about Dominic except that he was a pretty good fisherman.

Dunning: He started fishing in Richmond in the 1930s, and the brothers had a little shrimp camp.

Cox: There were two shrimp camp areas. One I showed you in that photograph, and the other was the Lincoln Shrimp Company out at Point San Pablo. But Angie actually occasionally fished out at San Rafael.

Dunning: Over by China Camp?

Cox: Maybe, I don't know. He showed me one time. He said, "We used to fish from that point of land," and it was on the present Santa Fe Canal. Oh, yes. He worked on and off for us in many capacities, and was more or less general factotum in maintenance. He became a very good friend of my family's, and we hired him to come over and do jobs for the house. We all thought, "Well, we're glad to have Angie here, because we know he's going to do a good job." He was always cheerful! By God, I never met a happier--at least outwardly--more pleasant man to be around.

Dunning: Was Angie married?

Cox: I never inquired about those matters.

Dunning: Because Dominic and Tony stayed single.

Cox: I think Angie might have been married, but I don't know. I've never inquired into the personal lives of the people that worked for us. I don't think that's good. I don't like to be nosey. If they're in trouble, I'll help them out, but only if they ask.

Dunning: I just wondered if it came out, because I know Dominic and Tony felt that the life of a fisherman was really hard, and being married made it more difficult, because you're away. Plus there's a lot more responsibility.

Cox: The Ghio brothers specialized mostly in shrimp. The shrimp kind of disappeared for a while, and then they reappeared. The problem with the shrimp, though, is after you land the shrimp--you know, you've got to have the labor. I suppose now, with the influx of people from Asia, you might get lots of labor, but in the last years of the shrimp business in Richmond I had a hell of a time getting people to pull out the meat from the shell. There were also some other problems. I'm not

- Cox: exactly sure what they were, but it involved the Board of Health, with open air drying of shrimp and that sort of thing.
- Dunning: The Ghios told me that they would have to get the shrimp back pretty fast and get them into big vats for cooking.
- Cox: Yes. Cooking was all right, but apparently they used to dry them in the sun, and I understand that there was some problems with the Board of Health, with birds and botulism. I don't pretend to know anything about that, except that I've seen them, and been around. Angie did a lot of carpentry work, he assisted Bill Cuneo in maintaining the wooden docks. Angie worked for me in those days more than he went fishing. He taught me how to make a fish net.
- Dunning: When I went to interview Dominic, he and his brother were still repairing the fish nets. They said they're the last two fishermen in the San Francisco Bay that know how to repair them.
- Cox: Those little nets, yes. Occasionally there's a few left up on the wharf and up in Bodega Bay that can repair the big nets, but to do that work on the shrimp nets you've got to be pretty good. I think they're probably right. Actually, nowadays it's cheaper to cut out a section and to buy a new piece if it's damaged. A shrimp net, you see, gets a lot of wear and tear because it's near the bottom, and if there's any scrap iron or anything down there, why, sayonara. Their little boats, lamparas, remain relatively unchanged from the days when they were powered only by sail. Angie did a lot with just oars. He rode from San Francisco up to Vallejo. In his youth he must have been a strong man.

Sardine Boom

Dunning: Were private fishermen very much in evidence in that early period?

Cox: You mean commercial fishermen?

Dunning: Yes.

Cox: [laughs] In a way, yes. Not the very early period. There were maybe five or ten boats maximum in the whole Richmond harbor that went out longlining or salmon fishing. Later on, Point Richmond became the headquarters of the sardine reduction business.

Dunning: At Point San Pablo?

Cox: Yes. That was one of the things my uncle promoted with a vengeance. We owned a lot of land out there, and the city owned some land. We had a lease on the city's land, so we were able to sub-lease it to many tenants, and there were many, many plants.

Dunning: Was this during the sardine boom?

Cox: Yes, there was the sardine boom. It was at Point San Pablo and no place else. Then, of course, the reason that the sardine stopped--people said was over-fishing--"no way." That's when the big hydro-electric projects and dams were put in and completed. If you don't dump mud down into the ocean you don't get minerals, you don't get the plankton blooms, you don't get the sardines, or any of these migratory fishes. So as I say, it went from eighty thousand tons one season down to seventy-five or eighty tons the next season. There was no plankton.

Cox: Also, at the same time, there was what we now call El Nino. Not as far north as this last one, but far enough to disrupt the temperature pattern. Fish were out there, but they were 250 miles off, going from the gulf of Alaska down to Mexico. You can't fish and bring fish in that far, you'll make mush out of them.

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As I say, they used to fish from two or three miles offshore to maybe five or ten miles this side of the Farallones. When the plankton stopped, fish didn't come on in shore, they stayed out where they could eat. Sardines are highly migratory, and everyone, even the merchant captains, talked about going through shoals of sardines, but about 250 miles out. You can't bring fish in--at least you couldn't in those days--because of the type of boat. The boat rolls and rolls, and sardines move in a liquid fashion in the boat, and after about the first five hours--the protein drops at one percent an hour--the fish begin to digest themselves and break up, and you can't process them.

That was the end of the sardines, both for San Francisco Bay and Monterey Bay, and to a great extent down in southern California. Fish would begin to pull in as they approach Mexico, where there was good plankton.

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[Date of Interview: July 1, 1986] ##

Dunning: You wanted to mention a few names that you had forgotten last week that just occurred to you.

Cox: I spoke of the man that drilled for oil and found only natural gas. He drilled his well in about 1922 or 1923, and his name was Robert Collins. They capped the well. They drilled in the Ellis Landing subdivision about a thousand yards east of the corner of Wright Avenue and Tenth Street.

My uncle was successful in getting Associated Oil to put in a tanker dock at the inner harbor across from the Terminal No. 3 installation, which assisted the Army Engineers in finding the tonnage sufficient to dredge the channel in front of the dock and the inner harbor. He also brought Richfield Oil in at the outer harbor and a small installation on the inner harbor, so that gave him increased tonnage. He located the McMillan Oil Company directly behind Terminal No. 1, so the combination of all this tanker tonnage--although the tankers were small in those days--was sufficient with the tonnage that was going to be developed over at Terminal No. 3 to get the engineers to come in and do the original dredging.

Dunning: Did the tonnage include also the Standard Oil tonnage?

Cox: No, the Standard Oil tonnage was way out at the outer harbor at Point Richmond.

Dunning: That was completely separate?

Cox: Yes. I'm talking about the dredging that occurred from the so-called Terminal No. 1 outer harbor, Point Richmond, around to Brook's Island then north to the front of Terminal No. 3 and the Santa Fe Canal. In about 1938 or 1939 we built a thirty thousand square

Cox: foot warehouse at Terminal No. 3 on the waterfront, immediately behind Terminal No. 2, for the Filice & Perrelli Company to store materials. I think that may be the confusion with the Filice & Perrelli, because that was the only building that they had at that time that was separate from their plant.

In 1938 we also sold a property known as East Shore Park to the city for a municipal park, which is still a park, I believe.

Dunning: Where is that?

Cox: That's due east of what used to be the town of San Pablo--it's now Richmond. It was quite a sizable park, used for recreational activities.

Point San Pablo

The Pillsbury Interest

Cox: Now if you want to talk about Point San Pablo a little bit, I can do that.

Dunning: Terminal No. 4 at Point San Pablo was not included in the original 1926 lease. Last week you had mentioned that there was a new lease drawn up in '36?

Cox: Yes.

Dunning: I'd like to get some background on that.

Cox: I have to go back a little bit and tell you what I remember about Point San Pablo. When we--meaning the company--went into the '26 lease we were aware that the Pillsbury organization had a pier out at Point San Pablo

Cox: where they were handling kerosene in cases, gasoline in steel drums, and asphalt in steel drums. We had talked on and off with Captain Pillsbury, who was a family friend, and who was one of the people that went in as a joint venture with us on some ranch properties in the San Joaquin Valley. It turned out that the Pillsbury interest owned much of the then Point San Pablo that was owned by the Standard Oil Company or the California Wine Association. They also owned a railroad, connected with the Southern Pacific interchange in the Standard Oil yards in Richmond.

Dunning: Who owned that railroad?

Cox: Captain Pillsbury--the Pillsbury interests. The southern terminus was at the Blake Brothers Quarry. They had a pretty big business hauling rock and gravel from Blake. The California Wine Company, called CALWA on their wine bottle labels, had been closed down by Prohibition. They'd had a large amount of business up to that point. The railroad had considerable business with the Standard Oil Company, particularly on asphalt and kerosene coming out to Point San Pablo, but because it was a short-line railroad they had a great deal of problems with maintenance and having the proper equipment to drive piling with trestles they had. They had a number of other problems that are unique to short-line railroads that are under-equipped.

So Captain Pillsbury met with my uncle, and the upshot of this thing was that we decided to negotiate with the Pillsbury interests, providing we could turn the railroad over to the Southern Pacific and the Santa Fe to operate it jointly. Therefore it would no longer have the disadvantage of being an under-equipped, short-line railroad.

Dunning: Was this called the Richmond Belt Railroad?

Cox: Yes. The Pillsbury group had great and grand plans for going all over the perimeter of Richmond, but they only went from Standard Oil through Point San Pablo and around to the Blake Brothers Quarry.

Because we had pretty good tonnage at Terminals No. 1 and 3 my uncle Fred Parr was able to negotiate rather satisfactorily with the Southern Pacific and the Santa Fe. It worked out that they were willing to take it over on a basis of five years for each party to run the line. So for five years it would be the Santa Fe crews, and the Santa Fe maintenance equipment, and for the next five it would be the Southern Pacific, and that was very satisfactory.

Dorward and Sons

Cox: We bought the Point San Pablo pier and the properties behind the dock from the Pillsbury interests. There were two companies that were occupying that property. One was Dorward & Sons, operating also as the Philippine Refining Corporation. They received rather large quantities of coconut oil in bulk, in deep tanks of ships, tung oil, and other non-petroleum oils which they processed through their plants. They had what they called cold presses, and they took out the colloidal particles and had very clear material which they sold to soap companies, paint companies, and brokerage houses.

Pacific Molasses Company

Cox: The other tenant was the Pacific Molasses Company. The Pacific Molasses Company had a connection with the Matson Navigation Company, which of course had very

Cox: involved interests in the Hawaiian Islands. The molasses would come in there in lots from 3,000 to 8,000 tons at a time from the Hawaiian Islands, where it was just held. It was not processed in any way, but was diverted to people like commercial solvents in San Jose, where they made alcohol and similar enterprises. Some of it went into stock feed, but very little.

Dunning: Would that go out on ship?

Cox: No, by rail car and truck. The stock feed business grew more and more as the feed lot business developed in California, and so more and more of their product went out by truck. The problem with the trucks was the bad road going out to Point San Pablo, and in those days it was very bad.

Dunning: Was it a lot worse than it is today?

Cox: Believe me, it was a lot worse.

So we bought that pier. Now, we also had a pier at Terminals No. 1 and 3, in which the city got fifty percent of the revenue because they owned fifty percent of the square footage and we owned the other fifty percent. But we felt that we couldn't operate a pier in competition with the city, so we sold all the land behind Terminal No. 4 to the City of Richmond. For around a hundred dollars we threw the dock in and told them we would give them twenty-five percent of the revenue of the dock, so that we could not be construed as being in competition with the city.

Dunning: Would that be for an indefinite period?

Cox: No. We leased the dock back from the city for fifty years. So we had two fifty-year leases: the so-called '26 lease at the inner harbor, and the '36 lease at Point San Pablo.

Cox: Point San Pablo went through several evolutions. When I say Point San Pablo I'm not including Point Orient and the Long Wharf. The Long Wharf, of course, was the creation of the Standard Oil Company and the company that preceded Standard Oil--Pacific Oil, or something like that. The Standard Oil Company had pipelines extending out to the Long Wharf for the receipt of unrefined products and the loading of refined product to tankers. They had their own electric powered railroad that ran out on the Long Wharf and went through the refinery, and that carried out drums of petroleum products. These tankers generally took on a few drums of exotic product, and also took on their own requirements for lubrication product while they were loading. The ship's supplies were brought out by this little railroad. It was on wooden piling.

Point Orient Wharf

Cox: The Point Orient wharf was a pier. The outermost pier or dock, constructed like a letter "F", had two sheds on it that could handle one tanker. About 250 feet behind that, like a letter "F", was a second shed that handled mostly lighters and barges--but that was very little used. That area was also used by a company that abortively attempted to handle whale oil. Right on the shore at Point Orient, in a cove just a little bit to the north were two brick buildings. There's now a Standard Oil employee shooting range there. The first tenants of those buildings were the people trying to refine whale oil. That didn't last very long. The Standard Oil Company put a can line in there to load cased kerosene. In those days all of the South Pacific and a good part of China was fueled by kerosene in five gallon cans--two cans to the case. They pumped the liquid kerosene over the hill from the refinery and the can line operated there for a couple of years.

Cox: That was proven to be difficult. The buildings were the wrong shape, and it was a poorly laid-out cannery. So they tore out the machinery after about a year and a half and put the can line back on the main property of the oil company. One of our biggest businesses for many years was the handling of kerosene and gasoline in drums. The reason that it was very inexpensive for the Standard Oil Company was because Point San Pablo was in the first switching zone of the harbor. So it was just a matter of a short switch--I think in those days about nine dollars a car. They would get twenty-four hours to unload, and we made sure that their cars were always unloaded so that they never had to pay a demurrage to the railroad. And we had a very satisfactory business.

Dunning: Were you connected to Standard Oil at that time?

Cox: We have no interest in Standard Oil.

Dunning: I didn't think so.

Cox: No, because we also handled at Point San Pablo dock, at the inner harbor, and at Terminal No. 1, the products of Shell, Associated Oil Company, and Union, as well as Standard. We also handled for the Standard Oil Company of New York. Their Pacific brand was Socony for gasoline. We also handled some cargo for Standard Oil of New Jersey, but not much. I suspect that that was all prepared at the Standard Oil refinery in a contract. Anyway, we got a lot of that cargo.

The Roadhouse at Point San Pablo

Cox: Right behind Terminal No. 4 at Point San Pablo, and between the land of the Pacific Molasses and the Standard Oil Company property was a huge roadhouse. It was an excellent restaurant--wine, women and song were

Cox: available there in quantity. When we first went out there--it took several days to load seven or eight thousand tons of cased goods into a ship--very few sailors ever went any further than that particular point.

Dunning: I haven't heard very much about The Roadhouse. Was it just popular during the thirties?

Cox: They also served liquor during Prohibition.

Dunning: That's probably why it was so popular.

Cox: That's where bachelors took their wives. It was busy. The regular staff there, counting waitresses as well as cooks and housekeepers, was about fifteen or twenty. So it was a pretty good sized operation. That disappeared because of a fire, and I recollect poking around in the ashes--it burned down about 1937 or 1938--and finding innumerable bottles and things. Of course, collectors had gotten out there before I did. I had other things to do at the time.

The Winehaven Property

Cox: The other place to eat was developed during the war. My uncle arranged with the navy to buy the California Wine Association property.

Dunning: Winehaven?

Cox: Yes, it was called Winehaven, but it was owned by the Calwa interests. The caretaker out there was a Mr. Simoni, whose son Forrest later became city manager of Richmond for quite a while. The navy put in a great many subterranean tanks, supposedly hidden from the water. But from the air they were quite evident because

Cox: of the cultivation of the soil on top of the tanks. Whenever it rained they would have green circles and showed up like a sore thumb.

They had a good restaurant up there. They took over the old boarding house of the Calwa Company and they usually had about forty or fifty people for lunch and about the same number for dinner. These people came because Richmond had become the center of the fish reduction industry of northern California.

Dunning: What exactly was Parr Terminal's connection to Winehaven?

Cox: We acted as real estate brokers. We tried to get somebody in there at the urging of the city for two reasons: one, we wanted to see the place developed because we thought there might be some tonnage or something which would come up to the dock; but more importantly, if we got the navy in there we'd get the road repaired.

So the navy came in and did a lot of road work, and then the city came in also because at the same time the fish reduction industry became centralized out at Point San Pablo. The road today is literally almost a freeway compared to what it used to be--red rock, carved out of the cliffs. But you must realize that trucks were few and far between when the road was first constructed, that rail transportation was everything. Point San Pablo, for instance, couldn't receive any cargo by trucks. It was set apart from the land by about a fifty foot railroad trestle, out to the deep water. It was set to handle rail cars on the apron, and rail cars behind the shed. It was only about 1943 or 1944 that we filled in the area so that trucks could at least back in to the central shed and discharge commodities.

Fish_Reduction_Plants,_1930s_to_1940s

Cox: The area became a mecca for fish reduction plants. There are pictures, and I assume there's one in Richmond still, that shows a hundred and one purse seiners discharging fish at Point San Pablo. We had an interesting combination of fish plants.

Dunning: This began in the sardine boom in '36 approximately?

Cox: Yes, 1936 and 1937. The first plant to be built in Richmond was the Richmond Fisheries. Walter Damiyamo was the manager. I was there in about '36, maybe late '35. Then fish reduction plants began to come in like you can't believe. You see, Richmond agreed to fish reduction because the smells were not carried over to the city. Standard Oil with its boaters stood between the citizens and the fish plants. We had down there the last wrought iron ship afloat, the steamer Lansing. She had a fish reduction plant on her. We had the hull of the old barge Monitor that had been built in Oakland to carry barley out to the Philippines and hardwood back. We had a concrete ship, the Peralta during World War I. There was the Peralta and the Redwood_City and a couple of others. They were abortive as cargo ships. But the Peralta was good for the purposes of fish reduction because her boilers were in good shape. She had lots of space, and was relatively dry.

I think the Redwood_City ended up down in Monterey Bay as a fishing pier. The Palo_Alto went up the river to Martinez, and I think she was used as a landfill bulkhead. So the Peralta was there; the old Southern Pacific Golden_Dawn was there; the Mazama, which was a ship that had been in a very uncertain trade on the coast of Mexico, was up there with a fish reduction plant on her; and a very fine little steamer, the San_Pablo, lay there. The Mazama, I think, was scuttled in her berth, because I got a contract with a fellow

Cox: named Erikson to remove her for the army engineers. We couldn't find any reason for her sinking. Anyway, she went down, and she went down in about an hour. The steamer San Pedro also was berthed there as a reduction plant. She was sold to China during the war. Also, the steamer Santa Inez was sold to Chinese interests.

There was the California Fisheries on the dock, and the Gardenia Fisheries was on the dock.

Dunning: Did they have actual buildings?

Cox: No, they went into the south end of the dock. The Richmond Fisheries was at the far north end of the dock. Then, walking around--I'm going to forget some of these, because I can't remember them all anyway--Kay Houden had a plant, as you were starting to walk around the corner. Then there was a company with the bizarre name of the Fish-Dee-Lish, and that was a reduction plant. Did I mention the Polarine? That was a tanker that was berthed around there and turned into a reduction plant.

The Red Rock Warehouse

Dunning: Was the Red Rock Warehouse up at that time?

Cox: No, Red Rock came in at the tail end of that. Where the rendering plant is now there was a plant put in by a Norwegian graduate of fisheries colleges--I can't remember the name. It was something like Pacific Fisheries. There were thirteen plants in operation out there at the same time, then Red Rock was built. The manager was a fellow named Dempsey. I think he's long gone to his reward. We had some stock in that plant. It was constructed to can sardines in the oval cans, the so-called booth cans. They also canned mackerel, for export principally, and tuna. We leased to the Red Rock Company a big space for barracks up on the hill.

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Cox: They had about seventy-five cutters, because when you get sardines or mackerel they've got to be cut right now, you can't wait. You cut them and put them in chilled brine. Then the "Tuna Queens," or the packers, can come in and fit them in the cans after a few hours. But they must be enviscerated and cut.

That was a big operation. Those people that were in those plants were the people that filled the dining room up at the Calwa place when the navy had it. The navy let anybody come in there to eat. I guess they were glad to have it used because their naval personnel was not enough to warrant keeping the place open. But it was a relatively large operation. The Southern Pacific and the Santa Fe both were running two trains a day during the fish season. Fish oil was selling for over a dollar a gallon. Fish meal, because of its high protein, was going for several hundred dollars a ton.

Dunning: Do you know what the destination was for the fish meal?

Cox: Stock feeds, for the fish meal.

Dunning: In this state?

Cox: All throughout the west. It went to stock feed, chicken feed--some went to fertilizer, but it was not a good fertilizer. It was very noxious when it began to disintegrate on the ground. The oils went to such things as paint companies and soap companies, and anybody using "Cold Press" sardine oil.

It was a busy time out there, with two switches a day. The railroads put up a station with a dispatcher and a telegrapher, and it was a very, very busy place when the fish were coming in.

Dunning: How would most of the workers get into that area?

Cox: They came by carpooling and by automobile, and the parking was incredibly difficult. We blasted quite a bit of that cliff down in order to make parking, using the rock to fill in the space between Terminal No. 4 and the shore so we could get trucks out. That made quite a parking place. The people in the barracks up on the hill parked up on the hill, and God knows how they were able to keep from going off the road--horrendous.

At the same time, a fellow--I don't remember his name--got from Standard Oil the rights to put in a yacht harbor to the east of Point San Pablo and to make a breakwater.

Dunning: Was that Captain Raymond Clarke?

Cox: The name's familiar. He brought around a bunch of hulks, mostly the old steam schooners, and put them in a horseshoe like bulkhead and then dredged it out. It was never very satisfactory. He never had really deep water in there because the tides were pretty fast from upriver and silt came in. But it's still there.

Lincoln Shrimp Company

Cox: The operation that has lasted perhaps as long as anybody's was the Lincoln Shrimp Company. It was between the Red Rock plant and the yacht harbor. It was run by a fellow named Chan--I believe that was his name--a very alert and bright gentleman. He had a large drying station and these big kettles where he would cook the shrimp.

Most of the shrimp were caught, as I recall, in either the China Camp area or what they call off-the-breakwater at Mare Island. There were about four boats

Cox: there. There was a shrimp camp also on the inner harbor, but it didn't last as long as Lincoln Shrimp. Lincoln Shrimp went out of business principally because it was difficult to get labor at that time to pull the shrimp out of the shells.

Workers At The Fish Reduction Plants

Dunning: Who were Mr. Chan's workers? Were most of them Chinese?

Cox: Orientals, yes.

Dunning: I heard that in most of the fish reduction plants it was pretty hard to get in unless you were Italian or Slavic. Is there any truth to that?

Cox: I don't know, I saw every race in the world there. You couldn't become a manager--you had to speak the patois of the Mediterranean--but other than that, they were glad to get anybody. Help was very hard to get, particularly climbing in those tanks and shoveling the raw fish into the conveyors. That was just like working in a sewer.

Dunning: To the best of your knowledge, were there mostly men at work in the fish reduction plants? Do you recall any women?

Cox: Other than the "Tuna Queens" over at the Red Rock, there were no women at all. A lot of relatives worked there. If a superintendent got a good manager, the manager brought his whole team down from Martinez, or Crockett, or wherever. That was pretty much the case. I never concerned myself with who was employed, except that I know that in some of the plants there were lots of Scandinavians--I know that. I would say that the make-up of the plants would very closely correspond to the

Cox: make-up of the fishing boats, which were mostly Mediterranean countries, with the exception of a few boats that were crewed by Scandinavians. The Japanese were not at all represented at that time; they came in after the war.

Decline of the Shrimp and Sardine Business

Cox: The shrimp companies did very well, but you see when the shipyards came in nobody wanted to get that work because everybody could go to the shipyards.

Dunning: And get a lot more money.

Cox: Bang. That was just the end of the shrimp business, at least at that time.

Dunning: Do you think that affected the shrimp business more than the disappearance of the shrimp?

Cox: Contrary to my good friend Angie Ghio, the shrimp never did disappear. They changed location. See, I used to fish all the time. I fished once a week out in the ocean. I'd get outside the Golden Gate, on a nice quiet, clear day, and there'd be a sound like rain--it would be the shrimps coming up and down. For some reason the shrimps moved out of the bay. There were some in the bay, but not anything like what they used to be. But they were outside in great quantity. Maybe the boys didn't want to go outside there. I can't blame them, because fishing out there was hit or miss. The weather was never as pleasant for fishermen as inside the bay.

If you want to say they disappeared, they did disappear from those locations that they were accustomed to fishing. They did not disappear as a Pacific Coast

Cox: marine species by any means. They have now returned to San Pablo Bay.

Dunning: Would you say the same thing about the sardines?

Cox: The sardines disappeared for two reasons: one, juvenile populations were decimated by over-fishing, particularly these big floating reduction plants. That's why the ships all came ashore, because the Department of Fish and Game was getting alarmed. No question of it. I saw sardines in the nets that were not more than three inches long, some of them. Schools of sardines, as is true of most fishes, move according to age cohorts: little ones stay together, the medium size stay together, and the big ones stay together. But if you put a set around a school of juveniles you've got all juveniles. They didn't like that because the juveniles hung in the nets and were hard to get out of the seine. You had to take a steam hose and boil them out. They got a lot of those, particularly out in the deep water.

Construction of Dams:--Loss of Plankton

Cox: At the same time the Bureau of Reclamation in all of its wisdom completed a lot of dams along the California coast, which is out where it was absolutely necessary for the maintenance of plankton. The mud that used to come down every winter would just insure an enormous bloom of plankton because that carried the minerals. Without minerals--nitrates, phosphates--you get no plankton. Our water became relatively sterile. The Shasta used to pour enormous quantities of mud into the bay, and the rivers, like the Sacramento River. When the Shasta dam went in, that mud stopped. There were a number of dams closed off at about the same year, and the plankton count just went down.

Cox: But while the fishing was there it was fantastic. The fishermen would come in in their boats and the plants used to bid for them. They'd come down to the end of Point San Pablo wharf shouting to the boats, "Come to my plant! I'll give you the best price!" There would be eight or ten men down there shouting. Then megaphones, and then later bullhorns, and finally going out to the boats in launches. This became such a bad practice--

Dunning: Like an auction.

Cox: The sardine people were worse than that. They decided to form an association, which they did. We gave them an office out at Point San Pablo. They allocated the boats to different plants on a rotation basis, so that everybody got an equal share of the fish.

Utilizing Waste Water:--Atlas Fish Fertilizer Company

Cox: Now, at this time there arose another problem: they'd put the waste water from these operations back into the bay, and the state people didn't like it. I always felt that actually it was beneficial, because fish of all kinds used to crowd around the waste discharge pipes--perch, smelt, and other fish, were almost pushing themselves out of the water to try to get at this waste water. It wasn't sewage. It was ground up bits of fish--some of it fresh, but mostly cooked, with colloidal and other tiny particles. A curtain would have screened most of it out.

The Department of Fish and Game and the California Department of Health didn't want that kind of water, so our company decided to do something about it. We built a plant right between the Philippine Refining Company and the Pacific Molasses, and we ran sewage lines down to all the plants and collected their waste water. We got some huge evaporators, that were past their prime, from the Campbell Soup Company, and we'd put the water into these big evaporators and cooked it down to a syrup. We were told that this syrup was an excellent vitamin supplement for cattle, which it was. So we called the company the Richmond Vitamin Company, and a fellow named Will Cox was the superintendent--no relation whatsoever.

Cox: We sent a gallon of this to the State Department of Agriculture to have them tell us how we could characterize the vitamin content. We got back a letter from a Doctor Cox--again no relation--who said, "You have an excellent stock feed additive, but you have a vastly superior fertilizer." It was very, very high in nitrogen--extremely high, concentrated. Now I speak personally: "I" formed with my aunt the Atlas Fish Fertilizer Company. I resurrected the tale of Squanto with the Pilgrims, teaching them how to put fish in the corn hills to make them grow.

We sold this stuff like hotcakes--you can't believe. We sold it for a dollar a pint. [laughs]

Dunning: Where would your outlets be?

Cox: [laughs] Oh, we didn't have to worry about outlets. We advertised in a couple of organic gardening magazines and people wrote in from all over the United States. A dollar a pint! We had to put labels on our bottles: "Don't take this," because people would put it in capsules and eat it because of it was high vitamin, high nitrogen, high phosphorus, and high calcium. They offered free testimonials. [laughs] Anyway, that was the side of business that was kind of humorous.

It was very, very profitable until the sardine business stopped and we had to bring in condensed press water from our own plants down in southern California. We bottled it up here in Richmond. But the source became too marginal, so we sold the whole operation and it ended up with the Ortho people.

Dunning: So it became part of Standard Oil?

Cox: Ortho, yes. We were glad to have somebody else worry about it.

Dunning: That's still going on.

Cox: Yes. I still buy it occasionally. It's pretty good fertilizer, actually--high in nitrogen.

We got this plant going, and then from eighty thousand ton reduction in one year, the next season there was no fish. It dropped down to sixty or seventy tons that were brought in, and they were in bad condition.

Dunning: We're into the forties now?

Cox: Yes. The fish plants were closed down, and everybody was waiting for a return to the good old days. I told them, "You have no chance. The fish won't come if there's no food." One by one they took out their machinery and went on their way. We took over the machinery of some of the plants and sold it. We took over the Red Rock plant and sold that. A rendering plant came in, down where the Red Rock Fisheries were.

Richmond Whaling Station

Dunning: Is that where the rendering plant is now?

Cox: Yes. The rendering plant is in what used to be the East Bay Fisheries plant. Then the whaling group came in, and for several years they occupied the building adjacent to the rendering plant. They sold most of their material to turkey farms. Whales used to be brought in and cut up with chain saws. Some of the blubber would go to the rendering plant, and some of the dried blood, but the big chunks of meat went to the turkey farms. They also sold the endocrine glands and made more out of that than all the rest of the whale.

Dunning: What did they do with the endocrine glands?

- Cox: The various companies that made pharmaceuticals would take them. Then some friction developed between the renderers and the whaling company, and at the same time the whaling operation was shut down by the International Whaling Commission.
- Dunning: The whaling station went in in '56 and moved out in '72.
- Cox: Roughly. That was the last fishing operation of any consequence.
- Dunning: It was also the last whaling operation in the United States.
- Cox: Yes, it was. We had a small interest in that plant. We had another interest in a plant up in Eureka, and we had a fairly large interest in a plant that closed in the thirties down at Moss Landing. But that's an old story, and it has nothing to do with Richmond.
- Dunning: Although the Parr family was involved in those three whaling plants.
- Cox: In a minor way.
- Dunning: You were minor shareholders?
- Cox: Yes, very minor. We got in through the back door because we used to have the ships that went up to Alaska, and they'd bring up what they called box shook for the canneries, and barrels for the whalers, and we'd bring back oil. But that was never any major interest with us. It was very minor. In fact we were phased out of that by 1924 or 1925.

Navy_Ammunition_Depot

Cox: The episode that next hit Point San Pablo with a rush was the navy. I was trying to find some kind of cargo. I remember reading an article in Fortune magazine about how they were putting in these big tank farms throughout the South Pacific and Asia, and I could see the handwriting on the wall for drummed gasoline and case kerosene. I warned the board of directors that we'd soon be out of business. Standard Oil had rebuilt the Long Wharf out of concrete, and their tankers were getting larger--they weren't huge yet. The war had just begun. We were in it, but we hadn't started to do much, and Pearl Harbor was shaking everybody up. So I went around to the navy and suggested that they load ammunition at Point San Pablo, and they took me up on it.

Dunning: This was right at the beginning of the war?

Cox: Yes, at the beginning of the war. You see, Port Chicago, the naval ammunition depot, had not been constructed. So we began to get all kinds of naval ordnance materials: torpedoes, and shells, and powder--all the things that naval ships take. Sometimes the vessels loaded directly there, sometimes the stuff was ferried to Anchorage 13--the powder anchorage of California City. But mostly the vessels came right there.

WPA Workers

Cox: I ought to say one thing about Point San Pablo: about 1938 the city was offered a tremendous WPA grant if they could find some work. Remember the city owned the dock and we leased it from the city. So for a number of

Cox: years several hundred men came out daily and worked at Terminal No. 4. They really didn't accomplish a great deal, but they were there. WPA was very much in evidence for a couple of years. The best thing they did was to fix the roof, and when the navy came in they had a water-tight roof anyway. That's one of the reasons the navy came in. There were other piers offered but they leaked; and besides, we were isolated.

Port Chicago Explosion

Cox: Then the cargo began to diminish as it went to Port Chicago, and then that blew up one night and we were back in business again with a vengeance, and we stayed that way all through the war.

Dunning: That started up immediately after Port Chicago blew up?

Cox: Within twelve hours.

Dunning: Was the navy prepared to deal with that?

Cox: Sure. They had contingency plans like you can't believe. If we had blown up they had other places to go. So it was an exciting time. The navy retained title to the road through the former Winehaven. Standard Oil retained title to the road from Winehaven up to the property that the city owned. The city maintained some of the road; we had title to a little piece of the road; and the Blake Brothers had the other section. The navy was quite interested in security, and I had big arguments with them because I thought their security was rather indifferent.

As an anecdote, they would ask your name when you went in and ask your name when you went out, and I used to have meetings with them and say, "This is no way.

Cox: You've got to take the license numbers of the cars. They've got to give some identification." They'd say, "Oh, too much work." So when I'd come in I'd tell them my name was Jones, and when I went out I told them my name was Smith. Then they called a meeting and they said, "We have a situation here where a fellow named Jones comes in all the time and never goes out, and Smith always goes out but never comes in." Once when all the plant operators were there, I said to them, "I think he comes in by water, I'm sure." Well, at any rate, they put in a decent security system.

Parr-Richmond_Superintendent:--Paul_Orloff

Cox: That's my only little anecdote regarding the naval security thing. Otherwise at the docks you couldn't get within a hundred yards of the dock unless you had all kinds of identification--which I had. They kept our superintendent Paul Orloff on the job all the time. Paul Orloff was our most trusted superintendent. He was a Russian, he'd been the vice-president of the Czar's lumber company in Poland. He came with us in 1937 or 1938. He knew the waterfront and he knew shipping, and the navy was happy to have him out there because he was able to help them in many, many ways.

So we gave the navy his services gratis. It was a very satisfactory operation, and we got an "E" out of that for that dock; we got another "E" at Terminal No. 1, and we got another "E" from the army at Terminal No. 3, where we loaded a ship every three and three tenths days during the war.

Dunning: What does "E" mean?

Cox: "E" was an award that was given by the navy, a flag that you could put up--a naval "E" or an army "E" or an airforce "E". That was considered quite an event.

Dunning: During this time what was your role at Parr-Richmond Terminal?

Cox: I was operating manager.

Dunning: You were still in your twenties.

Cox: Yes. My uncle was out doing his things, lining up lands to buy and sell. My brother was very successfully running the Nevada Copperbelt Railroad, which we had purchased up in Nevada, and operating a couple of other plants that were tributary to that set-up. My brother was very, very successful at keeping that railroad alive. We'd been asked to take it over by the Southern Pacific because they could no longer run it because of the Railway Brotherhood situation. The Brotherhood said, if you can run it, and if you'll keep the line open and the Sparks Goldfield Division alive, we'll let you run it any way you want to. So we ran it.

I was on the docks. I never went any place except to the waterfront. That was my life.

Dunning: During the thirties, were you mostly out by Point San Pablo?

Cox: I was first assigned to Point San Pablo seventy-five percent of the time probably. I was learning a lot of the business from Paul Orloff, too.

Dunning: Is he still alive?

Cox: No, they're all dead, every last one, as far as I know.

Cox: Point San Pablo had only one misadventure, and that was directly after the war. There was a New Year's Eve celebration up at Vallejo, and a big naval ship came barrelling down the channel and went right into Terminal No. 4 and cut her in half. The navy didn't question it, they rebuilt the center terminal for us. It didn't hurt the ship, except for the paint, but it just went through that dock like a knife through cheese.

There used to be lots of deer around Point San Pablo, until the war. I do believe that some of the people that were working as cutters up in the barracks up on the hill, and others, killed them. There were lots of deer. In the morning time when you'd come down there--I used to come to work just at dawn--there would always be seven or eight deer down by the road where the grass was high. I think Standard Oil discouraged them too, but there were a lot of deer.

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Dunning: Even today, going up over the hill down to Point San Pablo Yacht Harbor, you can see an occasional deer. It's always so surprising.

Cox: There were just scads of them then. There was lots of grass. Standard Oil kept burning the grass down--I could understand that--so the deer would come down where we never burned. There were lots of them, at the place where there's a beach park now; you go out to Point San Pablo and they have that little railroad museum out there.

Dunning: It closed in December.

Cox: That was the place where you could see lots and lots of deer. There used to be a ferryboat before they built the Richmond Bridge. The Charles Van Damm and another boat made--

Dunning: I did an interview with Tubby Snodgrass--do you know him?

Cox: I remember him.

Dunning: He worked on the ferries for quite a few years. We did an interview at the old ferry terminal.

Cox: Did you go see that old ferry boat over in Sausalito?

Dunning: No, we didn't.

Cox: I think the Van Damm is still in Sausalito. It was a restaurant. I don't know what it is now--it may be just a nothing.

I remember when they built the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge. It was going to be one deck. Tom Carlson, the city attorney, really lobbied for a second deck. He said, there's not the traffic today, but there will be. His idea was borne out. He really buttonholed every politician, and finally got a second deck. At first the bridge was very little used. Now, of course, it's fairly well used, particularly during the peak hours.

East_Brothers_Lighthouse

Cox: I used to go out to the East Brothers Lighthouse occasionally. We were the contact with that lighthouse. The Coast Guard gave us a huge megaphone, I'd say four or five feet long, and we'd rest it on a piling and shout out, "Lighthouse ahoy!" [laughs] Do it three or four times, and in fact I could shout loud enough that I could even awake the keeper and his wife if they were asleep. The wind was always coming off from that way, and we could hear them pretty easily, but it was hard for them to hear us. I'd give them whatever message I

Cox: had to give them, like that the power was going to be shut off for a few hours. They had their own generators, and eventually they had a telephone. Sometimes the power would be shut off for an hour or two and they had to put on the coal oil lamps up in the light.

When the light was decommissioned I thought surely it'd go to heck, but now the Richmond people have taken that over, and I guess they've made a pretty good thing out of it with that little bed and breakfast.

Between the East Brothers Light and Point San Pablo a barge of twelve to eighteen inch pipe, forty feet long--two thousand tons of pipe--turned over. People searched and searched and searched, with magnets and with dragging, and they couldn't find one pipe. I've often thought that that bottom is really silt, although the current goes fast, and that pipe would bury itself very rapidly. They never recovered one pipe.

The ferry steamers City of Vallejo and the City of Napa used to make the run between San Francisco and Vallejo regularly, and they used to steam by the dock at maybe twenty knots and cause a tremendous surge under the dock. Finally I got the Southern Pacific to have them move further west and go outside the Brothers. We used to have barges discharging molasses, and that sort of thing, and they'd beat against the dock like you can't believe. They still take molasses there, from those barges. I go by in my boat and I see the barges.

Dunning: Pacific Molasses must be one of the oldest companies in Richmond, other than Standard Oil.

Cox: Philippine Refinery is also an old one. The oldest company? I don't know.

Dunning: Just that and the Blake Brothers Quarry?

Cox: Yes, the Blake Brothers.

Dunning: Do you know any of the people connected with them?

Cox: I did--they're all dead. I came in there as a rather naive young fellow. They were all older than I--most of them anyway--and they dropped by the wayside as I went along. I have a note here if you'll just wait a moment. [tape off]

[tape on] I have the list of the land that the Bechtel-Kaiser people took over and who they got it from. From a fellow named J. Banzahaf, they took twenty acres; from us they took forty-four acres; from Captain Lauritzen they got nine acres; from Procter and Gamble they got fifty-four acres. Henry Kaiser told my uncle that, after the acquisition of the property, they were going to spend a \$120 million on that particular property. Actually they spent much more.

We turned over our land which we owned on the Parr Canal, formerly the Ellis Dock Subdivision with the understanding that they and the city of Richmond would have no objection to closing all the streets that ran into the water. They were not streets, they were just on the maps. Later Shipyard Yard No. 1 acquired twenty acres from the so-called Parr-Gilmore property, eleven acres from the Meeker addition people, and eight acres from the Ellis Landing and Dock Company. That pretty much represents Yard No. 1 in total.

The Winehaven Property

Dunning: Those are good figures. I have a couple of other questions about Winehaven and the navy: I have heard some rumors that the navy was trying to sell Winehaven--

Cox: Oh, yes.

Dunning: Is that true?

Cox: What is true, I don't know. That there was a rumor about that--that I know. I have no interest in it, except to have heard it. You see already Winehaven is an anacronism for the navy. As far as I know their only potential customer would be an oil company such as Standard Oil. I think Standard Oil--they call it Chevron now--says, so what? We don't desperately need it, we'll just sit still.

Dunning: It's a beautiful building.

Cox: It's a strange building, ever been in it?

Dunning: No.

Cox: The main building has a ceiling with a six-foot layer of rice hulls to insulate, for when they were aging the wine. The office building does not have that, although the thick brick walls do keep it cool. I stored some fish meal and some cotton in a big warehouse once, for four or five months when we needed the space. This was before the navy took over. That's when I found out about the six-foot layer, from Mr. Simoni, the caretaker.

But the buildings are not needed by the navy. Actually it could be made into a recreational area very readily if they wanted to do it, but I don't think the navy is about to do that. The building could become very much like it appears over here at Fort Mason, where they have all sorts of cultural events and that sort of thing. Or a marine historical museum, if they wanted--anything like that. There are many artist groups which could be accomodated. The navy doesn't need it. Some of the tanks are steel, a few of them are concrete. They're good tanks, and they'll be good for a long time.

- Cox: Of course, when you put an acid product such as crude oil or "Bunker-C" in a tank, you've already signed a death warrant, because the acid begins to etch away at the tank.
- Dunning: Were there any explosions at that plant that you recall?
- Cox: If there were, they were certainly kept under the belt. I never heard of anything. The navy ran a very quiet operation there, as far as I know. They rebuilt the superintendent's quarters, that row of houses. Those were all occupied during the war by officers and their families. But I don't know what the situation is, I haven't been out there.
- Dunning: I go out there quite a bit; they're still occupied by navy personnel. They have a great view.
- Cox: They're tiny. I used to go to dinner with Dr. Simoni, Sr. there. The navy still has an operation there, no question about it, and every once in a while you see a yard oiler, or a lighter, or a small tanker coming in there.
- Dunning: It seems like it's such valuable property.
- Cox: It's extremely valuable if you have a maritime operation. I remember my brother operated the Nevada Copperbelt, and there was a school up there, a beautiful large brick schoolhouse. After it was built the town burned down. The school is a beautiful piece of property, but good for nothing--there are no children in the area. Well, unless you have need for a waterfront, and unless you have need for tanks--it would cost a fortune to take those tanks out. The only thing I can say is that if it were developed as we have at the Golden Gate National Recreation Area that would be an ideal situation. And by developing a proper breakwater a decent yacht harbor could be built in, or a decent fishing port.

Dunning: Fishing pier?

Cox: For commercial fishermen. Commercial fishermen are getting the short end of the stick all around the bay.

Dunning: Is that because pleasure boats are moving in, and commercial--

Cox: It's hard to say. The port people say that there's not enough fish, and the fishermen say there's not enough fish because we don't have a place to process them in. It's a "catch 22" sort of thing.

Dunning: When I interviewed Captain Alan Clarke, who's the son of Ray Clarke, who owned the Point San Pablo Yacht Harbor for quite a while, he mentioned that, at one point, Parr Terminal tried to buy the land adjacent to the Point San Pablo Yacht Harbor, but they couldn't come to terms. Did you ever hear about that?

Cox: I think we talked about it, but you must understand that my uncle and my brother were always interested in expansion, and we always tried to pick up properties adjacent to properties we owned. I don't think there was any serious intent--there might have been. I was never privy to their conversations. They handled the things on the land and I stayed on the docks. You see, that wouldn't be waterfront property as far as I'm concerned--you couldn't handle vessels there. And the vessels have changed too. Just because you're on the water, you can't say, "Well, this is going to be a port." You're taking vessels that are drawing thirty-five, thirty-eight feet of water, and you have to have a couple of feet of water under them, even in mean lower low water [MLLW].

That's why the Bethlehem Steel never went ahead with their big plant up in the north point of Richmond. I handled all their cold-rolled steel for ten years, and they built a fabricating plant up there and a plant to

Cox: manufacture galvanized corrugated out of coal roll. But it was the failure of the world because it was so highly automated that nobody could run it. I talked to three of the managers who just tore their hair out in desperation because this galvanizing plant was so touchy that nothing could be correlated in the galvanizing line. In the old days you didn't have so much automation and they could control the various processes. So that plant went by the wayside. At their request I brought some potential buyers in from Japan for the machinery, and they just took one look at it and said, "This is too complex for us." I brought the Mitsubishi people in, Mitsui people, and one other independent group in.

They couldn't build a steel mill because they had to drive a pier a mile and a half out to where they had reasonably deep water. Driving a pier is easy, you punch a few piles in, but then you've got to maintain the damn thing, and it wouldn't work. They had iron ore to come in, they were going to have an integrated mill, using basic oxygen converters. I became very close to Bethlehem because I negotiated to build this big warehouse at the old Shipyard No. 1 for Bethlehem. I used to go to Sparrow's Point regularly to meet with the people of the Calmar Steamship Line, which is owned by Bethlehem and was their carrier, but we all saw the handwriting on the wall almost as soon as they built their plant.

Dunning: Which was when?

Cox: Fifteen, eighteen years ago.

Dunning: Not that long ago.

Cox: It's still sitting out there, if you drive out. There used to be a powder works. Now I think some part of it is a park.

Dunning: Out by Point Pinole?

Cox: Yes.

Dunning: In fact you can still see a lot of the old buildings.

Cox: There's bunkers. That used to be quite an operation, I went through there several times. I don't know why they moved. I guess the powder business became more and more efficient and that plant became more and more inefficient. That's a good place for a recreational area, for a park.

Transitions at Point San Pablo

Dunning: Is there anything else you'd like to add about Point San Pablo before we close that chapter?

Cox: Well, things will come to me, I'm sure.

Dunning: If they do, we can add them next time.

Cox: All I know is that Point San Pablo saw the transition from sail to steam to motorship. It saw the transition from general cargo to case goods to drum goods to liquid cargos. It saw the movement of commodities that were formerly handled by hand to everything being handled by pipeline or pumps or machinery. The fact that it was really isolated from the trucking industry cut it off as far as a general products terminal.

Point San Pablo used to be a place where the River Lines would wait for an opportune tide. They'd tie up their huge, huge barges. I remember one of them was loaded with Fords from the Ford Motor Company. It had picked them up at Terminal No. 3 and was waiting for the turn of the tide to go up river. They had these

Cox: enormous barges. They used to have a wheel house in the stern, up about twenty-five or thirty feet, so that the man in the stern of the barge could work the rudders to follow the convolutions of the channels. They went up to Stockton, particularly. There was never a day that a lighter didn't tie up, waiting for the turn of the tide. Now the lighters are all gone. I say all gone--

Dunning: Did they tie up at Terminal No. 4?

Cox: Yes. There are two bad points in the lower bay where the tide can slow you down so much it just pays to wait a couple of hours. One is Point San Pablo on the ebb, when the water just rushes out of San Pablo Bay in quantity; the other point is the Carquinez Straits, and the so-called Middle Ground, where if the tide goes one way and the wind goes another you've got a rough, miserable passage. So you try to go with the flood tide through that area if you can. That keeps your deck load drier, and you make pretty good time.

The company never had to dredge Point San Pablo at all until the Shasta Dam was completed, then it used to fill in at about an inch and a half or two inches a year. Because we always waited for the winter, when the tremendous surge of fresh water after a storm would come and just scour out the channel down to the gravel. So because of the dam, San Pablo became a relatively uneconomic dock to operate. Then we sold everything to the city back about six or seven years ago. They rebuilt the dock for tank ships only. They have a dredging problem, but most of their tankers are smaller. The vegetable oil tankers in the San Francisco Bay are never big. On the East Coast they're bigger.

Dunning: Did you sell out to the city before the lease was up?

Cox: Yes, we sold out everything.

Dunning: Just before the lease was up.

Cox: Yes. We owned some back land, and we owned a lot of other land, and we sold that completely. The people out there, Pacific Molasses and the Dorward people, were anxious to get out from under our thumb, because we charged for wharfage and tolls. The city does the same thing, but at least they felt they had a better entree with the city than they did with us. Because we had uniform charges--our tariff was the same as in San Francisco and anywhere on the coast. The city could make their own tariffs.

Dunning: Are they lower?

Cox: I wouldn't know. They let the people out there become the managers, and I can only say that whatever the people wanted I presume they were able to get. It has something to do with the mice guarding cheese. That's not my business, and I'm just talking--

Dunning: Is Pak Tank a fairly recent business?

Cox: I don't know the business. Where is it?

Dunning: It's not very far from the Red Rock Warehouse.

Cox: It came since I was there. It must be recent. There's only one little business I never mentioned, a tiny business: two young men from the Middle East built a little concrete block house right on the water, just before you get to the property of the Pacific Molasses. They made a deal for fishermen that had the small Italian lamparas like Angie Ghio used to operate to go out and catch herrings and anchovies--mostly herrings. They couldn't dock there, because there was mud, so the boys used to have little floats which they'd wade in the water and push out and unload the anchovies and bring them in and salt them. That went on for about two or three years, and I understand it was quite profitable,

Cox: but they certainly worked hard because they were up to their waists in water fifty percent of the time. I understand they did very well.

I used to fish out at Point San Pablo. It's still one of the best places in the world to catch perch on the incoming tide, at the south end of the dock. It was a place to get maybe a hundred, two hundred fish. There were lots of them. I don't know if they're still there or not--I can only presume they are, but the companies are dumping so much stuff in the water, it's just incredible. I never minded coconut oil, because that always floated and stuck to the piling and never bothered anybody, but some of the other stuff is unpleasant. But by and large life out at Point San Pablo was pleasant. We got the ships of the world when we were handling general merchandise--petroleum products particularly.

We used to have the Flood Brothers; they brought the Numea, the Beulah, and the Carisa. They had the South Sea trade pretty well tied up. They loaded their ships incredibly! I remember one time going under the dock to check one of the pipe lines, and I saw them chiseling a new Plimsoll line about eight inches higher than the old one. They even put cased kerosene in the companion ways--that's how they loaded the vessel. They carried maybe five or six passengers. The crew was mostly Polynesians. The cook on the Beulah was called Napoleon, the "Hermit of the Sea", and he would never go ashore. If he had to transfer to another ship he'd go by skiff because he was afraid of being on the land, and for about forty years. When the Beulah turned over near the Seattle Harbor, they put him in an ambulance, and they say he went crazy. That's a little anecdote.

But you cannot believe how they loaded these ships! The Flood Brothers' supercargo, who was in charge of loading, was a fellow named "Two-Gun" Jackson, and that son-of-a-gun could load! He could figure the metacenter

Cox: of a cargo within six inches. The ships went down to their marks incredibly. I wondered how they would make a winter passage down to the South Seas, but they did.

Dunning: Were there any watchdogs to make sure that they didn't overload and there'd be danger?

Cox: The Coast Guard always checks the Plimsoll mark--not always, but generally, and the dock superintendent usually writes down the fore 'n' aft draft--which we always did. But we weren't responsible because we didn't load the ship; the Flood Brothers loaded their own ships. The fact that one of them turned over up in the Seattle area is an indication--she wasn't on the high seas, even. Those things were so tender that even in the bay, when they were going out, they'd rr-o-o-ll over, and then they'd come bb-a-a-ck a little bit, and they'd rr-o-o-ll over again. I used to talk to the mates, I'd say, "How do you make these voyages?" And they said, "Well, we use up a lot of fuel, oil, and water, and that makes us lighter." But oh, my goodness!

Dunning: You wouldn't want to be out in one.

Cox: The Scandinavian ships, the Dutch ships, the German ships, the Norwegian ships, ships from Australia, ships from England, the Boren, the Cydic, the Nordic. Those were days when working on the waterfront was a great pleasure. You met very sophisticated passengers who knew how to travel by freighter, and in most cases very decent officers in both deck and engine. This is when women began to appear as crew members and stewards on the Scandinavian lines, and later, when we handled the Russian vessels, of course women made up a big part of the crew.

Dunning: Are you talking about the sixties?

Cox: Yes. The first cargo vessels to carry women were the Scandinavian ships. The women did steward's work mostly. They'd get very well paid, because those ships carried passengers. They'd normally get a pretty good salary, but they made pretty good tips--I understood from some of them. I knew several of them from the round trips that they made, and they were pleasant ladies. They always wanted to ride to San Francisco so they could shop. [laughs] I was occasionally able to oblige.

That trade is gone completely, those vessels are gone. The container ships don't carry passengers. You have to go on a cruise ship if you want to travel by boat. There are freighters that you can get passage on from California but they are few and far between.

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The dock at Point San Pablo is really a sterile place now, compared to what it was.

Dunning: Do you see any future for it?

Cox: At my age the future is far in the future, and I don't see too far. The past colors most of my thinking. But I did see Richmond, I did see it for a long, long time.

Richmond's Japanese Sister City Program

Cox: One of the things I want to talk about later is the Sister City Program, because I'm the man that was the first ambassador, and I think that should be part of the history of Richmond. The people over there can tell you about it, that on July of this month on the twenty-fifth anniversary there's a mob coming over--fifty from Shimada--and I presume an equal amount will go from Richmond over to Shimada. They do every year.

Dunning: There was an ad in the Contra Costa Times, they were looking for host families. I'll definitely write that down, we can talk about that towards the end.

Cox: I'll talk about the start of the program, but then you'd better talk to people in Richmond about how it goes on, because I made a point to start it and turn it over to the city. I felt that if corporations played with it it would become stupid, and disappear, and be nothing. I brought the first English teachers over from Shimada to San Francisco. I'm going to meet the first one that came over, a fellow named Fugita. He's coming over here the seventeenth or eighteenth.

Dunning: You've made many trips to Japan?

Cox: I was born among Japanese people here in California. I knew Japanese fairy stories before I knew "Little Red Riding Hood" or "Mother Goose."

Dunning: How was that?

Cox: I was born among them. There were baby sitters. They were around the house, and they took care of me. I'd go to their house and knock on the door and ask for mochi and rice balls.

Dunning: Did you learn to speak Japanese?

Cox: I understand that there are three Japanese languages: there's the women's language, there's the so-called standard Japanese, and then there's the baby language. There's actually four, but the fourth has kind of disappeared--it's the language of the court. But hell, I could speak baby Japanese, although I've forgotten ninety-nine and nine tenths percent of it because I've been asked not to use it.

Dunning: You've been asked in Japan not to use it?

- Cox: Yes. Well, the pronouns--what are there, thirty-four or thirty-five pronouns!
- Dunning: You can really insult people if you use the incorrect word.
- Cox: Yes. They say, "We know from what stable the horse has come," because so many western men learn their language from ladies of the evening, and believe me they have a patois all their own. So instead of using a normal pronoun, for instance, I could say "Watashi." If I were a woman I'd say "Watakushi." "Boku" means a little boy about five or six; fat and jolly. I'm not little, so they all laugh, and that's all right, I can do that. I always take two interpreters. I pretended to never understand a word anybody says.

Reflections on Richmond

- Dunning: I'd like to plan for the next session: it's probably time we started talking about the war years and the negotiations.
- Cox: Yes, I can talk about some of it. I didn't do much of the negotiations, you know. My uncle Fred Parr was the "agent provocateur."
- Dunning: I remember you said you were the chauffeur.
- Cox: I was the man in attendance. I carried out the orders, but--
- Dunning: Well, whatever you recall.

Cox: I recall about the development of the government business and the development of the shipyards, and the metamorphosis of the life of Richmond, and its bizarre change.

I spent a lot of hours in the days after the war with the police. If you ever saw a group of frustrated men--it was just terrible. I remember walking down the street one night, at eleven clock, down Macdonald Avenue, about Sixth through Seventh, somewhere in there, maybe down towards Fourth, where I had my car parked. I watched a bunch of kids just laughing and breaking windows out of parked cars--that sort of thing. It didn't bother me, because in those days I carried a gun. I had no compunction. I've only used it to bend nails, I never fired it except once in practice, but I've told people I have a gun. I said, "Look, I've got a gun, and I'm scared, and never, never, never bother a man who's frightened."

Dunning: That's what you'd say? You wouldn't think they'd even bother you too much, because you're so big.

Cox: They don't. Well, they all think I'm on the police force if I wear a hat. I used to cage drinks until my wife got so mad. I could then go to bars in Richmond or San Francisco. This is the way you do it. If you've got a friend, tell him to come with you and see how it works. You go in to a bar and wear a hat--not with a big rim, but you wear a hat. You walk up to a bar and you don't sit down. You walk up and lean on the bar. You reach in your pocket and you take out fifty cents--no more and no less--and you put it on the bar. Then you look at everybody in the house.

Bartender says, "What do you want?" You say, "Bourbon." You push your fifty cents and say, "I don't care what the price is." He'll push the money back and say, "Okay, sarge." [laughs] You drink it, say, "See you later," and you walk out quickly. But if they did

Cox: exactly what I told them--bartenders either thought I was from the police or the Board of Equalization. But mostly the police. I looked over everybody in the place--right in the eye.

Dunning: Quite a game.

Cox: My wife heard about it, and she said, "Don't you do that anymore!"

Richmond's Entry into World War II Shipbuilding

Todd-California Shipbuilding Corporation

[Date of Interview: July 9, 1986] ##

Dunning: From the research I've done, it appears that the development of Richmond into a shipbuilding center or war production center began about a year prior to Pearl Harbor. Todd-California Corporation accepted a contract from the British purchasing commission to build thirty vessels for Britain. Could you elaborate on the sequence of events leading to the formation of the Todd-California Shipbuilding Corporation, and your uncle Fred Parr's role in this?

Cox: Well, Fred Parr was acquainted with Henry Kaiser. We gave Henry Kaiser his first job as a contractor at our pier in Oakland. I say "we": I'm speaking now of my uncle and the then Parr Terminal. He knew Henry Kaiser, Sr. quite well. He had a speaking acquaintance with one of the Bechtels--either Steven or Kenneth, I can't recall which. He knew that they were going to bid on Canadian Liberties. Several other places knew about it too, but Richmond was the area that offered the greatest potential in immediately available acreage--reasonably immediate. It had to be filled a little bit.

Cox: My uncle, as I understand it, wrote a letter to the Bechtels, and apparently they followed that up with an intensive investigation. In any event, I attended a meeting in the latter part of 1937 or early 1938 at the offices of the Bechtel Corporation. At that time I was just driving Mr. Parr around. Attending that meeting was Steven Bechtel, Kenneth Bechtel, and two representatives from the Kaiser organization.

Also, Captain Lauritzen was in attendance, and a representative of the Procter & Gamble Company, J. J. Moran. My uncle had worked on assembling about ninety acres of land which included the properties of, I think, the Enterprise Foundry--I'm not sure; the Enterprise Foundry, Procter & Gamble, the Parr-Richmond Terminal Company, and there might have been one or two others.

Dunning: I have the name of a Richmond N & I Company. What would that be?

Cox: That's Captain Lauritzen, the Richmond Navigation and Improvement Company. He was there. My uncle had talked to all of these people and got them to agree to come and talk to the Bechtels and the Kaiser representatives. At that meeting it was generally agreed that they would go ahead with additional engineering studies rather promptly, to determine the suitability of the property, and feasibility studies regarding access to the property by rail and electric current--all of the things that a shipyard would need.

The meeting lasted about four hours, as I recall. I know that Mr. Parr met with the Bechtel and the Kaiser people together and separately many times afterwards to put things together, and the upshot of it was that they founded a shipbuilding company. Now, what I'm saying is just from memory; I had no reason to follow the fortunes of the shipyard operation.

Dunning: You were in your early twenties.

Cox: Yes. I was working with the company on half-days and holidays, Saturdays and Sundays. Of course after I was twenty-one I was working full-time. I'd worked in the company since I was thirteen working Saturdays and such, earning money. As I say, I've visited Richmond almost twice a week since I was five years old or so. So I have vague memories of how things happened. The business ramifications I don't recall too well, but I do recall physical changes. The Bechtel people stayed with the operation until about half way or three quarters of the way through the production of Canadian Liberties. Then we knew we were going to be in the war, Pearl Harbor occurred, and the so-called "arsenal of democracy" was about ready to go into action.

Henry Kaiser, who was the son-in-law of Harold Ickes--then Secretary of the Interior, I believe, in the federal government--he negotiated a contract through Ickes to build ships for the federal government, the so-called American Liberties. The difference between the Canadian Liberties and the American Liberties was that the Canadian Liberties, that were built in the first episode, had coal bunker hatches--the No. 3 hatch was mid-ship. They could either burn coal or oil. The American Liberties were the standard three hatches forward, then the house, then two hatches aft, but the hulls were virtually identical. It was a very satisfactory hull. The engines were virtually identical, triple expansion steam engines boilers. That's when the yard became known as the Kaiser operation.

Dunning: Right after Pearl Harbor.

Cox: Yes, about that period. I don't believe the Bechtels retained any interest. They might have, but I don't think so. At least I never heard their name mentioned after it became the Kaiser operation. Then when the first Bechtel-Kaiser operation was put together they

Cox: formed the California Shipbuilding Corporation, and then they brought in the Todd people from southern California, who were experienced shipbuilders.

Assembly-line Method of Building Ships

Cox: The Bechtel-Kaiser group provided--as I understand it--the incentive to start the so-called assembly-line method of building ships.

Dunning: Was this the first time in history?

Cox: Yes, as far as I know. There was another massive ship building operation during World War I at Hog Island, in which the so-called three island weldeckers were built, scads of them, for World War I. But it was just building a ship on the ways from the keel up. The concept that was developed in the Richmond shipyards was to build the keel and the main frame, but prefabricate as much as they could. They prefabricated the houses--in pieces of course--brought them over in huge trailers and put them aboard the hull, which was being fabricated, and then they would go down into the water. They'd have most of the heavy work done, but the boilers and main engines were put in at the outfitting dock. They would tow the hull around to about a 700 foot pier which was on the Lauritzen Canal, and about a 450 foot wharf which was on the Santa Fe Canal, which was shaped like a letter "L."

The first building that was built was what was known as the Mold Loft. They laid out, on the second floor, a fantastic series of lines, carved into the floor, which represented the exact size of every plate that was to be cut. Obviously there were many, many plates, and the building was only a certain size, so the carvings overlapped each other. It was a mass of

beautiful carvings. It took engineers a long, long time, with the theodolites and all sorts of surveying instruments, to make these lines rather exact for every piece that was to be fabricated. Then they would cut paper patterns, and the paper patterns were, as I remember, transferred to plywood patterns, which went to the fabricating shop. But they had to build the Mold Loft first, because that's where their ship was born: taking the blueprints and making the entire ship in the Mold Loft.

Dunning: Where was the Mold Loft located?

Cox: The Mold Loft was on South Fourth Street. It's still there. It had a round roof--it's in the photos. Just a hundred yards east of the Lauritzen Canal.

Then they built simultaneously a huge fabrication plant, where plates were rolled, formed, and cut. Of course the inventory of plates was out in the open where there were big racks of plates. The machine shop was built about the same time as the fabrication building. That's gone. The only thing that's left of the shipyard is an office presently being used--it was moved onto the present site from another location. There are two office buildings that are left. Otherwise everything is gone. They would fabricate these plates and bring them in to the ways to be welded.

One of the big problems was to bring power in, because the amount of electricity used was enormous. I recall that P G & E put up a substation, which still exists, down on Hoffman Boulevard. Water was not too much of a problem. They had domestic water, but they installed huge big pumps in the bay for sea water for the fire system, which could be turned on readily.

Demand_for_Shipyard_Workers

Cox: As far as the shipyard's concerned, the biggest problem was employment. When the first yard was constructed they'd relied on the pool of shipyard workers that came from San Francisco. There was the Bethlehem yard, and the Moore yard in Oakland, and some other smaller yards. Also construction welders were in the pool in the Bay Area and that wasn't so bad. When the contract was signed with the government to make American Liberties--I never saw the contracts, but I was told--the first was on a cost-plus basis, and later it was on a cost-plus a fixed fee basis.

Fred_Parr's_Role_in_Accumulating_Land_for_Shipyard

Dunning: Where did your uncle fit in this contract?

Cox: He was again brought in to accumulate land for what was known as Shipyard No. 2, which was over around Thirteenth Street, east of the Ford Motor Company Plant, using the Ford channel as an entrance to the area. He had land there, and he helped to accumulate surrounding land, but as far as negotiating the yard contracts--he had nothing to do with that.

Dunning: I did read that he made several trips back and forth to Washington for negotiations.

Cox: Exactly. Our company was not to build the ships, but Fred Parr was one of the people that was asked by the maritime group--either the War Shipping Board or the Maritime Commission--to assist in accumulating lands. Because the land that he got for all of the yards, even Yard No. 1, was transferred over to the federal government. In Yards No. 2, 3, and 4, the government took title immediately.

Dunning: I have to get this clear in my mind: your uncle had the lease for the land from the City of Richmond--

Cox: Yes.

Dunning: But then everything was overwritten?

Cox: Well, the land which he leased from the City of Richmond was never involved in the shipyard work, because that was only about ten or eleven acres and was a working marine terminal. The rest of it our company owned. So it was a matter that for much of the land he had literally gone through a formal condemnation proceeding so its title passed.

Then he assisted in assembling small pieces of property. The government appointed Mitch Borquin's office, here in San Francisco--a very well-known attorney--to assemble the several hundred lots that were sold--twenty-five by eighty or a hundred feet. They were sold to hundreds of private people all over the United States during the 1920s. A group of promoters would bring in interested investors, and they would put loads of lumber on the lots and say that there was going to be a great industrial empire constructed here, and these people would buy lots for \$200 or \$250. Then they'd bring in another group of people and show lots sold, and then they would move the lumber to the other vacant areas. Jack London's widow had a number of lots right where the shipyard ferry slip was built. I remember that name very well.

But the assembling of the properties for the government was a slow and tedious thing, because there were people all over the United States--heirs of the owners, principally, by that time. Some of them didn't want to sell. Furthermore, the government had gone in and built quite a few of their installations right on land, without the owners' permission. If their owners couldn't be located immediately, they built: the war

Cox: was on. Eminent domain, or something like that. They went in, and these condemnation proceedings for these little lots lasted until several years after the end of the war. It was very tedious.

I think there were--if I said 350 or 400 small lots--I would not be far from the mark. People bought land that was under water, and these confidence men, which they were, sold lots that were in the deep-water channel, and people were so impressed with their ability to make money, as these men explained it--that great development was coming, industrialism. At that time nobody knew about the shipyards. This occurred during the period between about 1924 to 1929. People were just throwing their money into anything to get rich quick. Of course that collapsed.

My uncle's involvement and the terminal's involvement was almost completely [restricted to] the land acquisition, although he did use his good offices--he was quite well-known in Washington--to introduce some of the new men in the shipyard organization to senators, congressmen, and the Maritime Commission people. He was very much involved in the American war effort--emotionally involved. He went on one of the big Appeal Boards for the Selective Service. He organized the most efficient collection of tin cans in the United States; he worked out in the Bay Area to have a collection of tin cans, and also aluminium cans and pans. He had other activities that were quite similar.

But the shipyards just burgeoned all around us. As fast as they'd begin to build new shipways they'd begin to build housing, and the Kaiser organization did ninety-nine percent of the recruiting, all over the United States. They brought in particularly large numbers of agricultural workers from the southern states, who had never seen a factory, let alone a shipyard. One of the earliest buildings that was constructed over at Yard No. 2, a big, big building, was

Cox: a school to teach welders. They had other trades they taught too. In the end they brought the population from, oh, I don't know, maybe twenty or thirty thousand--

Dunning: It went from twenty-three thousand to over a hundred and twenty thousand.

Cox: Yes, that's right.

Dunning: Can you clarify one thing for me? I know there was the Todd-California Shipbuilding Corporation, but also there was the Richmond Shipbuilding Corporation. What was that?

Cox: That was one of the companies that appeared momentarily on the scene in the transition between Bechtel and Kaiser and the U.S. Government.

Dunning: I've seen the name several times.

Cox: It was not a big factor, or I would have heard more about it. Richmond Shipbuilding, you see, is one of the names that appeared particularly around the Yard No. 1 area. Later it reappeared at Yard No. 3, as I recall. Yard No. 3 was different. At Yard No. 3 they built graving docks. They constructed the ships on the same method as the assembly line, but they were constructing them on graving docks. Instead of launching them they just flooded the docks and the ships floated out.

Wartime Transportation Network

Dunning: Was Yard No. 3 prefab?

Cox: Yes, everything that was done in the Richmond shipbuilding region was prefabricated. A completed ship went into the stream once every three and three-tenths

days at the height. It was fantastic. They built a ferry slip at the head of the so-called Parr Canal. They built a light rail--electric line--from Oakland which was parallel with what is now the freeway, and picked up people from all over Oakland. There was quite an extensive network of big electric cars in Oakland, and they'd converge on big temporary stations that they built. On a twenty-four hour basis these big grey cars would move out to Richmond to discharge shipyard workers. They'd discharge them at Shipyards No. 1, at No. 2, and around by No. 3. They didn't go all the way out to No. 3, but there was a place where they let people off that was close to it.

Activity at Yards No. 1 to 4

Cox: They tore down hills. They removed Easter Hill to make a rock fill for Yard No. 1 and some for Yard No. 2. They carved the east side of the big ridge at Point Richmond, took out thousands and thousands of cubic yards to build Yards No. 3 and 4. Yard No. 4 was really not a big yard.

Dunning: Where exactly was Yard No. 4?

Cox: If you stood at the intersection of the Lauritzen Canal and the Santa Fe Channel, and if you looked right across on the southerly bank of the Santa Fe Canal you'd see Yard No. 4.

Yard No. 4 was one of the last yards that was constructed, and it was primarily concerned with the construction of small landing craft. Yard No. 3 built a number of fairly large vessels--large for their time--the victory ships, and they built several hospital ships. Yards No. 1 and 2 built strictly Liberty Ships until the very last part of the war, and then Yards No.

Cox: 2 and No. 4 built what they called C-4's, which were large and looked like tankers from a distance, with the house forward and the engines aft. Some of those ships were afloat under the American flag until about eight or nine years ago, and there may be several left up in the reserve fleet. There are still some Victory ships up in the reserve fleet.

There was, as I say, a launching approximately every three and three-tenths days. The launchings were so frequent that the launching ceremonial platform was on a trailer. It would haul from yard to yard a bandstand and spectator stands, all decked out in bunting, and nobody had to decorate anything--it was all done. They would put them in front of a shipway and bang, she'd go down the shipway. My mother christened the Thomas Short, named for a prominent small engine manufacturer. Their problem was to find celebrities to christen the vessels. Everybody would get their picture taken. They went through it just like it was a big affair, but they did it so often that it became rather tedious. I knew two men who occasionally came over to play in the band, and finally they used a phonograph with an amplifier, because bringing in the musicians was kind of a chore. The phonograph was more efficient.

Wartime_Changes_on_the_Docks

Dunning: How did the war change your particular job in Richmond--and your life?

Cox: Well, I went down to the docks, and all of our male employees in the dock offices were taken away. They were enlisted as officers in the CB's--construction battalions--or the quartermaster group, loading and unloading ships, or went into other departments in the army and navy. There was just me, and I employed women,

Cox: and men who couldn't be drafted because of physical problems. We did a hell of a job. Our work started before we entered the war, because the British Ministry of War Transport began to buy military equipment at a rate you can't believe; also Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. They bought things that were assembled on the West Coast in plants throughout California and Nevada, they purchased trucks and military vehicles of all kinds, and enormous quantities of drummed petroleum products.

We began to work like we never worked before. We were set up to handle mostly refineries' drummed products, and Terminal No. 3 became the headquarters for the British Ministry of War Transport in the Bay Area. Terminal No. 1, because of its rather bad physical layout for general cargo, was used for petroleum products in drums. Sometimes we'd pile the drums four high. Fork lifts were just coming into being on the waterfront. They were still somewhat of a novelty, but many piers had them.

At Terminal No. 3 I developed the largest forks on the fork lift ever made up to that time, as far as I know. The forks were eight feet long. Now, of course, that would be trivia, the way they handle containers. I could go in and pick up a crate--everything was crated. Trucks were not in the open. Cars were not in the open. Military supplies, everything was in big crates. I could go up to a flat car and pick up a truck, or even two trucks in their cases, and put them on the dock. I filled the land behind Terminal No. 3, leveled it, graded it, paved it, and we had a--

Dunning: You did personally?

Cox: Yes, I was over there the whole time. At that time I was six feet-six inches tall--I was too tall to be drafted. Besides that, they gave me the category of an "essential worker," since I was the only one left. [laughs] The only one who knew how to run the docks.

Dunning: I asked you about that exemption because it seemed to me that you would be the perfect age to be drafted.

Cox: Oh, I was.

Dunning: The size was an issue.

Cox: Yes, nothing fitted me--in those days. I guess now it's different. I tried to get into the California Maritime Academy, and they had a steel rod across the doorway. They told me to stand up straight and walk under that rod, and I stood up straight, and it hit me right in the forehead. They said, "You're not eligible."

I was an apprentice pilot on the bay, under Captain Grouper. I occasionally helped operate a tow boat that brought ships' lines from the ships in the stream up to the dock so that they could be hauled into the dock if, for some reason, they had not made an adequate approach to the piers.

The American entrance into the war became a nightmare. We were handling British Ministry cargos, and then the armed services began to descend on us. At Terminal No. 1 we had two tanks, each holding ten thousand barrels of gasoline, inside the dock. Behind the dock were a number of oil companies: McMillian Oil Company, Rio Grande Oil Company, there were seven or eight other little oil companies that received their products from southern California by water.

The air force wanted to have a place to handle bombs and other air force munitions, and we worked out a deal so that they could operate at Terminal No. 1. We kept two of our employees there who were well aware of the dock and who acted as wharf superintendents. The air force had their own military group handling explosives. The same thing happened out at Point San Pablo and at Terminal No. 4. The navy wanted a place that was relatively isolated to handle naval munitions.

Cox: Port Chicago was under construction, which was and still is the big naval ammunition depot. We had two of our men out there, sometimes three. The navy operated a little differently. We had the responsibility for unloading munitions from rail cars and placing them on the dock, and then the naval people would supervise the movement of munitions by regular longshore gangs into the hold of the cargo vessels.

At this time the navy acquired the California Wine Association properties and built these huge underground tanks. They'd been looking at that for some time. My uncle had offered it to them--

Dunning: Before the war?

Cox: Yes. He'd offered it to many people that might be interested: oil refineries, petroleum brokers, all kinds of groups. In fact he'd even purchased a tanker, Currier, and he was going to be involved in that himself, but when the war came along he accelerated the navy's interest.

Fred Parr spent a great deal of time in Washington. He wanted to have the development of Point San Pablo because he believed that if there was more development out there, the road--which was very vicious, unpaved, almost a trail--would be improved. Also there would be more electric power coming out there and water. There were lots of reasons.

He worked with the navy, but the City of Richmond carried the ball quite heavily on that, and the Richmond Chamber of Commerce. A fellow named P. M. Sanford, who was then president, went back with my uncle--he was one of the directors of our company, incidentally--and the mayor of Richmond.

Dunning: Who was that, Mattie Chandler?

Cox: She had been a mayor. I don't know if it was Scott, or Chandler, or who--I don't remember the list of mayors. But he would take delegations back. He only made a couple of trips and the navy snapped it up and built these big tanks in the ground. The tops were at ground level and they put earth on top of the tanks and let shrubbery and grass grow. [laughs]

And they built a pier. The old Winehaven pier was utterly, utterly useless. They tore out ninety-nine percent of it, I think. They built a fine pier that's still there. I went by it last week in a boat and the pier was in good shape. The tankers were moving in and out of the Standard Oil Company, carrying the white product out and the black product in, and that accelerated. We operated twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. It was a time of madness. We got three "E"s from the different services--that was a little award flag they gave you which we were quite proud of.

Communist Sympathizers on the Waterfront

Cox: But there was also something rather interesting. We knew that at that time there was a group of communist sympathizers working on the waterfront, and we knew that, at least in the Richmond area, they were meeting in the furnace room of Terminal No. 3 during lunch hours. We didn't pay any attention to it until the naval intelligence got a hold of us and said, "You know, these meetings are being held. Can we use your office right above the furnace room?" I said yes. And a lieutenant--his name will remain unknown--put a microphone down the furnace duct and took a lot of tapes. I don't know what he did with them and I couldn't care less.

Dunning: Were these longshoremen?

Cox: I don't know who they were--I'm not going to say who they were.

Dunning: Were they working for Parr Terminal?

Cox: I don't know.

Dunning: [laughs] Oh, you won't say.

Cox: Why should I?

Dunning: It seems like an interesting story.

Cox: It is. They met there for several months, and then the meetings were moved and they had meetings at several homes, elsewhere in the East Bay.

World War II Internment of Japanese Citizens

A Personal Recollection

Cox: At this time the Japanese Americans and native Japanese citizens were moved out of California.

Dunning: Do you have recollections of that?

Cox: We had many, many friends who were in agriculture, and I made available to them a vacant warehouse in Point San Pablo, quite a large one. It had been used by Fish Deelish Corporation, which had by that time moved out, and it was just chock-a-block with the goods and household furnishings of these displaced people. About once every thirty days some intelligence officer, or somebody from the federal government, would display proper credentials

Cox: and ask to be admitted, and go through all these things--again, and again, and again, and again, and again. So much so that they commingled some of the stuff, which I had carefully separated.

In fact, I had big heavy sheets of craft paper separating different people's belongings. It was all commingled, and much of the things like good cameras, and other small items like that, evaporated during this period. I personally was the only person who had a key, and there were no other exits or entrances. Everything had been barred up, and I'd actually put sheet metal over the rear doors. All I know is that they evaporated, and they were terribly commingled, terribly messed up. Sad.

That's the only other thing I'm going to speak about. We had other involvements, for which my mother particularly was honored, and myself also, by the Japanese government after the war. We were very angry because these people were our friends, and more than half of them were born in the United States. It just infuriated us.

Dunning: Did you know any Richmond residents that were displaced and returned to Richmond?

Cox: No. I knew of several, that I had met just casually, but as far as I know they never came back. Most of the people that I knew never came back. They came back to reclaim their properties and sell it. We bought a lot of properties from the Japanese before they left, for one dollar, and held them during the war, and then when they came back we sold it back to them for a dollar plus any taxes that we'd paid. But most of the time we were able to lease the property so that they had a little money coming when they came back.

Dunning: Where would these properties be?

Cox: Around the Santa Clara Valley. But that's another story.

Richmond, A Series of Villages

Cox: Richmond became a series of villages. The housing developments were broken up into little sections, some with very attractive names. Each one had a church, which was used by several different religious groups at different hours of the day. They built temporary schools, and each area had one or two restaurants where meals could be purchased at moderate cost. Vendors were encouraged to come in and set up little stores for canned goods. Each place had a kind of a PX type of thing, but, as I understand it, concessionaires rented the space, and there were price ceilings on everything. They sold both food and clothing to the shipyard workers.

Shortage of Cemeteries

Dunning: I heard that there was a line for everything.

Cox: There was a line of people for everything all the time. One of the big problems was cemeteries. Right in Contra Costa County, there was a shortage of cemeteries. Most of the population had been brought in were Negro people, and they had a hard time finding places for them.

Dunning: The cemeteries were segregated?

Cox: Yes, very definitely. That was one of the places where lines formed. At one time the mortuaries in the coroner's office were jammed with people waiting to be

Cox: buried--rather horrible. That's a trivial thing I mention, it's got nothing to do with the war, but if you talk about lines. We were petitioned by ministers from the now called black community to build a cemetery, because actually it's a tremendous investment, a very, very profitable business, because all you do is mow the grass, and the money they pay for perpetual care is earning interest all the time. But we felt that was a little bit out of our line, so we didn't go ahead with it. We also got opposition on zoning, and we didn't want to buck that.

Development of Industries in North Richmond

Cox: Instead, we located a number of industries out in North Richmond, quite a few. I say "we", but from now on, when I talk about anything except the harbor, I'm talking particularly about two people who were extremely competent in this business: Mr. Fred Parr himself, and my brother, his nephew, Fred Parr Cox. Both of them are geniuses, and tireless in contacting people, presenting properties, and making either lease deals or sale deals. My brother inherited the ability of his uncle, and he was actually a very close protege in this. I was on the waterfront, and he was on the land. In the history of the development of North Richmond, and industries around the inner harbor of North Richmond, those two gentlemen are the principle agents in that development.

There were over a hundred listed industries that were located by them. It's quite impressive. Many of the industries are now gone. For instance, the Rheem Manufacturing Company, the famous people making hot water heaters and furnaces, were making military shell casings and things like that. That operation, of course, is gone. The Rheem people still make things. I don't even know if they're still located in North

Cox: Richmond. But that was typical. They had to expand. And then there was a fellow named Bount, with the Richmond Steel Pipe and Tank Company--that was a big operation. That's gone. United Chemical had quite a large set of laboratories and of the first electronic microscopes in the Bay Area. They did research out there.

There were a number of companies, and then on the inner harbor there were just lots of operations, but the war--

Dunning: All that came during the war.

Cox: During the war. Nobody knew how long the war was going to last, but the industries went ahead and built buildings on the land they purchased because everybody had the feeling that things were going to go along quite well. Of course they didn't, economically. After the war there was a general sagging of the economy and a general let-down of aggressiveness on the part of industrial plants to expand.

At that time, at the end of the war, because I used to talk to the captains of ships, and the mates, I began to get the picture of what was happening in the Pacific with the construction of bulk facilities for petroleum, and I could see that we were going to be out of the running in handling our principal peacetime products, which were petroleum in drums and cased kerosene. So that was one of the concerns that we took hold of and met as the war began to wind down.

Industrial Accidents

Cox: We had our share of troubles. At Terminal No. 1 a gasoline tank in the dock sprang a leak. We had three thousand tons of bombs on the dock. I went out there

with my brother, and they were repairing this leak, and there were two or three inches of gasoline down in the depressed railroad tracks. He was quite excited. That was one of the anecdotes of the very early part of the war. They eventually emptied those tanks and filled them with water so there wouldn't be any vapor in there.

Dunning: Did you see accidents during the war period?

Cox: Oh, quite a few--I never saw ~~them~~, I saw the results. It so happened that I was never present when somebody was hurt. For example, at Terminal No. 1, there was a vessel taking away gasoline from those little companies behind Terminal No. 1, and a leak occurred in the pump room. The engineer in charge was repairing the leak, and one of the sailors came over and lounged in the doorway and said, "How's it going?" The fellow says, "I'll get it fixed in about fifteen minutes." There was a little gas on the floor.

This sailor lit a cigarette and tossed the match into the gas, inadvertantly. The pump man was blown against the wall but not hurt, because he was kind of hidden by the big pipes and pumps. The sailor that had thrown the cigarette was blown up and out through the skylight--of course the skylight was blown up ahead of him--and landed on the deck of the ship. He was only scorched, but he was badly bruised. That was the most serious accident that occurred during the war.

I used to patch up people. We had a huge first aid room, almost a tiny infirmary.

Dunning: That was just for Parr Terminals?

Cox: Yes. We had two cots and a tremendous big store of first aid supplies. I used to patch up incidental injuries before sending them up to either the Richmond Hospital or home. Little things, cuts--well, some of them were pretty good cuts. You know in those days they

Cox: used hooks: a man would hold a hook and stab it into a case and pull it to move it around. They carried it in their hip pockets. We had two or three instances of men sitting down so rapidly--they were tired or something--that they stuck the hook in their backside. I had to take these fellows and lay them down, and I used to pour peroxide over the area, and they'd yell a little bit. I'd slap a big bandage on them and send them up to the Richmond Hospital.

As I mentioned earlier, splinters were always a hazard. Men would neglect to put on gloves. We furnished gloves, and they always took their gloves. They used to come back and swear they wore out, but since they were leather with the back of the hand of canvas, I knew they hadn't worn out. But they were there anyway. I wonder how many gloves were sold, or given away, or accumulated in the homes of some of these people. Splinters were the big injury.

On the waterfront later, after the war, we've had several serious accidents, but during the war the Parr Richmond Terminal Company doubled the number of foremen we had, and almost tripled the number of superintendents. Their first duty, above everything else, was to watch out for safety, because there were so many people swarming over the docks, so much cargo moving in and out, three and four railroad switches a day, each bringing in twenty-five, thirty, fifty cars, that we were very busy. But if you let accidents occur they have a wave effect, so we watched that very, very carefully. We were quite lucky.

Dunning: I was going through some ~~Richmond Independents~~ from the war years, and it seemed like every day there was an accident--

Cox: That was in the shipyards. I knew a fellow named Bob Reynolds, who was an attorney for the shipyards who processed claims, workman's comp and that sort of thing.

He said that, in the case of some of these people, the accidents were caused by people going to sleep someplace they shouldn't, and doing things of that nature. Under the shipways were an enormous number of little cubicles that the shipyard workers constructed, and they had tapped into the water lines and the power lines, and they had little apartments under there. The shipyard superintendents were timid about going in there, because they were rather harshly rebuffed.

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All the life boats that were to be put on board the ships at the outfitting docks had canvas covers, and so the people would sometimes slit the cover, sometimes untie one corner and crawl under there, and go to sleep. They'd be asleep in the life boats which were waiting to be transferred to the ship, and they were picked up by the cranes not very gently, and occasionally they would be tipped. People would slide, and all the stuff in the life boat would pile up on top of them--it wasn't secured until the life boat was on the chocks on the ship. There were several accidents like that, but people sleeping was the principal thing.

Another thing was that the welders used to get coughing spells from working in the double bottoms over in the prefab yards, and finally they worked out a way of having big fans to move the air around. The shipyard people had to learn too, because they were developing new processes, new to that kind of industry, and with people that were new to it. So it was a learning experience on everybody's side. But by and large the safety precautions were pretty well carried out.

Security Measures in the Shipyards

Cox: The security was ridiculous. A man in Richmond became famous for pasting a picture of Hitler on his badge and going in and out with no problems.

Dunning: I have heard stories of how people would clock in and then walk out.

Cox: Oh, yes. There was very little way to control that, although they tried, because there was a continuous stream of people coming in and coming out. Later they became more sophisticated and enlarged the pass out gates quite a bit, particularly in Shipyard No. 1. By the time Shipyard No. 3 was developed their security was pretty good for in and out.

At nighttime, you know, in all the cities, you couldn't have lights shining. Streetlights were dimmed or turned off, exterior lighting on buildings was turned off, and the downtown areas were quite dim and dingy. But the shipyards--my God!--they shone up like beacons, just from the welding machines alone. At Terminal No. 3, if I were to turn a newspaper toward the shipyards at midnight--Shipyard No. 1 particularly--I could read it. There was just this tremendous blue glare from the arcs of the welding machines.

Dunning: Were you still commuting over to San Francisco at that time?

Cox: I always commuted.

Dunning: What was your schedule like?

Cox: Well, one day I went to work and didn't come back for twenty-one days. So what was my schedule?

Dunning: You were in Richmond that whole time?

Cox: Richmond, San Francisco, wherever I had to go to do what I had to do.

Union Activity During the War

Dunning: One thing I wanted to ask you about was strike activity and union activity during the war years.

Cox: On the waterfront as a whole--I'm not interested in shipyard strikes, I know nothing about them, and I'm not interested in uptown strikes. It's the waterfront I understand. There was an enormous push by waterfront workers' unions to inject worker participation into management decisions. There were excellent attorneys working for the labor groups who tried to read the fine print and turn it into finer print.

For example, under the basic contracts of the waterfront there was the worker's usual overtime provision. Then there was penalty time, if you went beyond a certain number of hours on the overtime. But a fellow named Louis Goldblatt, who was secretary of the union, figured out that they should get overtime on overtime. He brought pressure on all the employers to such an extent that the whole thing ended up in the court in San Francisco.

This case went on--because the entire Pacific coast was involved--for some period of time.

Dunning: Beginning approximately when?

Cox: This was just after Pearl Harbor, and I guess it went on for six or eight months. They called me to testify. Looking at the entire Pacific coast I was just like a drop of water in the ocean. Every port was involved,

Cox: but the cases were principally held here in San Francisco, because what was decided here would apply everywhere.

Mr. Goldblatt was defeated on this. They tried every scheme under the sun. They had worked out a provision that we had to pay meals if they worked for a certain period of time. Everybody brought their own lunches, but we had to pay for dinners. Then they said that restaurant prices were too high, so I went around to more than a dozen restaurants in Richmond frequented by shipyard people and by other working people and got their menus, and presented them in court, and I was able to hold that down--as far as Richmond was concerned. What happened to the rest of the coast I couldn't tell you, it's too far back.

Up to this point, in the longshore and the warehousemen's unions particularly, there was a very strict rule on how many tons per hour could be loaded aboard a ship. Any more than that and the laborers were censured. Louis Goldblatt brought up in labor relations that there was a Russian coalminer. His name was something like Stakhanov, and he wanted to apply the merit system on the waterfront and to maintain the present speed of loading ships in the contract, but to pay bonuses if this were exceeded on this [Stakhanov] system. I attended the labor meetings in those days, and I didn't like it, and none of the other employers did, so it never got anywhere. That should give you kind of an idea of the temper of the waterfront.

We had one strike at Point San Pablo for about fifteen minutes. A brand new Swedish ship--literally brand new, from the yards in Gottenborg had come through the Canal to the West Coast laden with cargo, and was going to pick up a cargo to go to Australia and New Zealand at Terminal No. 4. It is a courtesy, not a requirement, that a foreign ship fly the flag of the country in which he is visiting up at the foremast.

Cox: This ship had no flags, it just had a Swedish flag, and a longshoreman in the middle of the day looked up and said, "No flag--everybody off!"

So everybody walked off, and just then a Standard Oil tug was going by, and I had a big megaphone. I hailed her over and I said, "Give me your flag." They gave me their flag, and all the people saluted, and the flag went up to the foremast. That was the only strike during the war that I was involved in on the waterfront directly--it wasn't a strike it was just a little job action. It was kind of a pitiful thing, as I look back.

Price Control and Uniform Tariff

Dunning: Was there quite a bit of pressure during the war period not to strike because it was unpatriotic?

Cox: Yes. And there was a lot of pressure on employers to give into demands that might cause a strike so that there wouldn't be a strike, but remember, we were under price control. Our company was also under a uniform tariff.

Dunning: Could you give me a definition of price control?

Cox: Well, the government says, whatever your prices were back in December of last year prior to Pearl Harbor, that's it for the duration of the war--and that was it. Unless something unique comes along, then you had to petition the OPC--Office of Price Control. They would send out an officer from the local office to find out why you wanted them higher. It took about three or four months, and then you could increase your prices.

Cox: For example, if some cargo that had never been handled before was brought in, and you were asked to handle it, you had no way of assessing--well, you could assess, but you would lose tremendously. Except if, for example, when the Ford Motor Company began to assemble tanks at Terminal No. 3. We had no tariff item for tanks. They were very, very difficult to handle. They had to be towed over. There were no engines operating. The tanks were dead in the water, as they say, no power, and you had to maneuver them around. It took a long time, a lot of men, and a lot of equipment. So I had to petition for that, and that's the only thing I remember petitioning on. It took about three months or so to get relief on it.

That's price control. The uniform tariff is understandable: all the ports in the San Francisco Bay had the same charges, tariffs filed within the Federal Maritime and the California Public Utilities Commission, which was formerly called the California Railroad Commission. I pulled out of the filing with the Railroad Commission because I was able to prove that I had no business within the state. All my business was foreign and off-shore. I didn't handle anything domestically, so I was able to eliminate that filing. This was during the war and after the war. I was involved in that quite a bit.

But it was a time of madness. At nighttime they used to send down troops to Terminal No. 3 to be trained in how to load and unload cargo, because they were going overseas as labor battalions. We'd put these men in with our regular night shift men, and that was a period of horror. These fellows were willing, but there are techniques for handling cargo that are learned only through experience, and none of them had any experience.

We had one big theft problem during the war. The British Ministry of War Transport (BMWT) had three thousand tons of euphemistically titled "tinned luncheon

Cox: meats"--Spam. We'd put it into a pile twenty feet high and maybe thirty by fifty feet. It was to be put on a special ship to go with some other materials, but they wanted to put some priority materials on, so the "tinned luncheon meat" was left behind. When the time came for us to tear down that pile, there was only a shell of "tinned luncheon meats." The pile was three feet from the wall because of the fire regulations. People had climbed in through a clever door and had made a hole through which there were several cases, which they'd emptied, and which they'd push in and out to get in.

They dined on "tinned luncheon meat," and they took away two thirds of the pile. We found that they'd eat from the cans, stamp on the cans, then they'd flatten out the cases, and there was about five feet of debris in this hole they'd created. That was rather startling. Oh, there were investigators over there like you can't believe. There were British officers and American Intelligence officers. We were not held liable. We were certainly accused of negligence, but everyone agreed that we had no way of knowing, because the pile went up to the rafters. They admitted that the entrance was very cleverly conceived.

Handling Russian Ships

Cox: Another thing that we did that was quite interesting was when we began to handle Russian ships. They came in to take on caustic liquid used in industry in Russia--I can't remember the name of the particular caustic. We were the pier that the Armtog Purchasing Commission had designated as the place to take on supplies. I used to get very angry, because in those days butter was rationed, and our government agreed that every sailor on board these Russian ships should be allocated one pound

Cox: of butter a day. We knew very well that they were selling it, or doing something with it, it was not being consumed.

They would order cheese to come from the factories in wheels that were so large that the only way you could handle them was to put a four-inch pipe through the hole in the center--that was made there for that purpose--and use a crane or a ship's tackle to lift this about two thousand pound cheese. This cheese was covered in cloth and waxed. It was a white cheese, I couldn't tell you the name. I remember that the cheese came down at about four in the morning, on two trucks, and we put these big wheels of cheese on--these were to be taken ashore for the Russian population and the army, I guess.

The captain was supposed to take them on in the early morning hours when it was pleasant, but we couldn't get him to do anything and we couldn't talk to him. He was too busy doing whatever he was doing. The cheese stayed out there until ten o'clock, and by ten o'clock the sun had warmed the wax, and it kind of ran down a little bit, and he refused the cheese. The only thing I could do was to tell him that he either took the cheese aboard or I was going to call the Russian embassy in Washington D. C. and tell them that their captain refused to take food to Russia, and I knew they were starving. It was the only thing I could think of to say, and he took the cheese, but we had quite an argument for about fifteen minutes through an interpreter.

Paul Orloff, who worked for us, spoke Russian very well. He had been the vice president of the Czar's lumber operations in the border between Poland and Russia. But he was out at Terminal No. 4 at the time, where he was a general superintendent. He spoke Russian, Chinese, Japanese, and a little German, and English, of course. He came to work for us in about 1935 and stayed with us all through the war until he

Cox: died when he was quite elderly. He was one of the most colorful superintendents because he could take any of the foreign ships and find some authority on board he could speak with.

Dunning: He must have been a real asset.

Cox: Yes, as I say, we were very fond of Paul Orloff. He was known all over the bay as Paul. People would call us from the East Coast and say, "I want to talk to Paul," and we knew very well who. They didn't know his last name, so that's how he was identified.

Changing Face of the Waterfront

Cox: There were a lot of colorful men on the waterfront in those days. I saw that disappear, much to my sadness, because the waterfront became a dull place to work. The ships became so huge, and we loaded so fast, that technology was required--even in loading the vessel, which was accomplished through experience. Knowing where to put the cargo to keep the ship stable--this began to be handled by computers, and all the old men who knew the game disappeared. Tow boats disappeared, except for the big ones, to handle docking. Lighters disappeared. There were lots of lighters on the bay during the war, lots of them, and almost within a year or two after the war they disappeared.

Today the most important thing you can do when a ship comes in is to have a big box of videotapes on board so they can have movies at sea, because they're only in port for eighteen to twenty hours. Now the masters and the mates, and sometimes the chief engineer, can bring their wives. The Europeans had done it for years, before the war.

Cox: The things that made the waterfront interesting disappeared. I used to know the names of maybe fifteen or more captains of tow boats around the bay. I was intimately acquainted with the people that lived as crew men on barges. Some of the barges, the tank barges, had quarters, and they'd have the one or two deck hands who stayed on the barge. I knew a lot of people.

Problems with Richmond's Container Facility

Cox: Those barges are gone. The techniques of handling cargo have changed. Richmond is now a place where liquid bulk cargo, dry bulk cargoes, petroleum products, or containers are handled. General merchandise is no longer a factor. They built a container port there, but that's another story. I didn't follow that closely.

Dunning: It hasn't exactly taken off.

Cox: That's why I never put in a container station. We made studies; the Mitsubishi Corporation came to me three or four times--I'm very close to those people--and begged me to figure out how to put in a container station. Because of my relationship with the Japanese government, they would give me all the container business in California for their account--they had many ships.

I couldn't figure out how to fit it in. They offered to give me a bankable contract. Mitsubishi is a very wonderful firm, I've known them for thirty years, a very honorable firm. But I couldn't fit it in. It takes an enormous area to service a container operation, and you've got to have enough ships to make it worthwhile. You can't just hope for a "vessel of opportunity," as it's called, to show up, and only if she can't get a berth someplace else. That's what Richmond is doing, in effect.

Dunning: They basically have room now for one?

Cox: One vessel, or they might handle two. They wouldn't try to load the fore and aft at the same time, but that's not the point. They don't have the contract they thought they had with Matson Navigation. At the time I was very dubious that they had such a contract, but they said they had. It turned out they didn't. They had some letters that showed interest--well, hell, those were a dime a dozen in those days. I feel sorry for Richmond because they put in a beautiful operation. Of course what they needed, and didn't do, was to take over the Ford Motor parking area, which became University of California property, and build a small installation and make sure they had some accounts. But no.

That's what happened to San Francisco. The commissioners were so busy doing other things--at least that's my opinion. I do believe that they put people on the port commission that were not port people, and San Francisco let the ball slip out of its hand. They have a big container operation down in the south end of town, but it's nothing like it could have been. They could have had everybody, but they didn't do it in time. Oakland did.

Once you start an operation, like Standard Oil, that started a big refinery with tankers, that sort of sets the pattern for that area. Tankers know the region, and shippers know to buy and sell, and foreign brokers know. It's the same with containers. You have a port that is set up to handle it, and has some business to keep it open--and you know it's going to keep it open--you're going to book there. Oakland has expanded, and expanded, and expanded. I went by there last week, and where we used to have the Parr Terminal at the outer harbor, they've got a very big container operation.

Cox: The Albers Mill is no longer Albers Mill, but the grain silos are still there. I don't know to what degree they're functioning, but at least that's the only thing that I remember that was there when I was young.

Dunning: I recently read a proposal to combine the three ports of San Francisco, Oakland, and Richmond. What do you think about that?

Cox: That's smoking opium. I was one of the people that tried to put forward the Golden Gate Port Authority, because I had a great big feeling that if there could be some central planning regional commission in this area we would begin to stop this ridiculous battle between ports for cargo, and to build facilities before there was any use for them. The late Don Fadzackerly of the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce--I'm going back quite a few years now--believed that that might be something of the future.

Just like we have two airports, one in Oakland and one in San Francisco. Our company tried to build a Golden Gate International Airport in an area between Brooks Island in Richmond and Point Isabel. A study was made, that's one of the last places to be fogged in, but the two different cities went their own way. It's all right, civic pride's a good thing, but it's inefficient. Now you couldn't build an airport there if you wanted to. There's so many homes around there that people would complain about the noise.

Dunning: Do you think there would ever be an agreement where the three cities would get together?

Cox: Not in my lifetime. I haven't got many years, but not in my lifetime. I've seen the growth of the waterfront to where it is now, and I will make a flat statement that I think, generally speaking, the growth of the harbors around the perimeter of the bay is now at a plateau where it will remain for some time to come. To

a certain extent it's overbuilt.

The future for San Francisco, and a very profitable future, lies in the development particularly of the area north of the Ferry Building for things other than general merchandise and cargo. Those piers are no longer valuable for ninety percent--oh, they bring in a few little chips of paper from Canada, but other than that general merchandise is just a dream. They can handle what little they've got at the piers off Third Street. Richmond has no capacity now at all for general merchandise. Everything has either got to be in a container or go through a pipeline.

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Post-War Planning for the Richmond Waterfront

[Date of Interview: August 12, 1986] ##

Dunning: I've been doing some research on the Kaiser papers, and one of the things that I was impressed with was that the Kaisers started planning for post-war almost as soon as the war began. How soon did the Parr Company, and specifically your uncle, start post-war planning?

Cox: At the beginning of the war he turned almost his full attention to industrial development, both in the Richmond area and nationwide. I was left with any post-war planning, which was actually considerable. That was my department, as far as the Port of Richmond was concerned. The waterfront was my responsibility.

In the early part of the war my brother went up to take over a railroad in Mason Valley, where he became the general manager when the family purchased the Nevada Copperbelt Railway. He went up there to whip that operation into shape. I know he tried to bring in industries to bring commodities onto the railroad. He worked to get a company that made sheetrock from local material and another company that provided horsemeat for human consumption to the Bay Area. He worked out the big gypsum operation, to send carloads of gypsum to southern California for the citrus groves, and a number of other little things like that.

Utilization of the Forklift

Cox: My post-war operations at the Port of Richmond were to continue to expand the facilities, and particularly in the general cargo business to utilize the forklift, which was just making its presence felt on the

Cox: waterfront. In fact, I believe that I had the first two forklifts made by the Heister Company up in Portland. Other companies were buying forklifts hand over fist. One of the big problems at that time for the Port of Richmond and for all the ports in the Bay Area was that there was no agreement on the size of the pallets on which cargo were placed. So we had many meetings to try to standardize it. The army had one size, called army board, and then there was a board that was fairly standardized, a trucking entity, which was a four by four board, and then odd sizes which individual manufacturers would create in order to handle their products.

Wartime Change in Cargo:--Stowage Problem

Dunning: Before the forklift everything was manual?

Cox: There were cranes, and solid-tire tractors that would haul little trailers around from the cargo piles to the ships, or from the ships to the piles, and then they were more or less manually put into place. There were also conveyors for sacked goods that were loaded by hand, but you could pile the sacks as high as the load limit of the floor would allow. You see, the war brought on an entirely new type of cargo consist. Before the war everything was in barrels or boxes, crates, wooden cases of rather uniform size, or sacks. Then along came the demands of the military, and you had everything from cased rations up to mobile army tanks.

A whole new method had to be evolved, because prior of the war, in Richmond, anyway, a ship would come in and load several thousand tons of lubricating oil or gasoline--petroleum products--in steel drums. When the war broke out they'd still come in and get steel drums of gasoline and engine oil but they'd also be loading

Cox: provisions, all sorts of things that the army would require overseas. Every ship was a horrendous problem in stowage. We had one unique cargo that went to Australia--filled the entire ship, because the cubic content was so high--that was five tons of prophylactic kits. I recall that the ship stood out of the water like a sore thumb because there wasn't the weight to put it down there.

We had to handle all types of commodities. At the Port of Richmond most of the general merchandise was handled at Terminal No. 3. As I mentioned earlier, at Terminal No. 4 at Point San Pablo we had a contract with the navy where naval munitions were handled exclusively. Terminal No. 1 was air force munitions, principally bombs. We'd load a ship completely full of bombs, one after the other.

Safety Precautions Around Explosives

Dunning: Were there any special safety precautions?

Cox: There were the safety precautions you have around any kind of explosive. They had lots of soldiers sitting on the roof of the warehouse, sitting on the ships, sitting on the railcars that brought the munitions and bombs in, stopping people at the roads coming in. The usual. No smoking, that sort of thing. But the most important thing when you handle bombs is the carpenters. There's a tremendous amount of carpentry work done and a tremendous amount of lumber used to shore up the cargo in the ships. We had lumber stored up all the way from Terminal No. 1 up to the Garrard Tunnel, and the ship would take almost one third of her weight in lumber used to shore the bombs, to keep them from rolling about on the high seas.

Activity at Terminal No. 3, 1940s

Cox: At Terminal No. 3 I was able to handle three services simultaneously. I handled the British Ministry of War Transport, and seventy-five percent of their commodities were vehicles, either cased or set up--vehicles including bulldozers and mobile cranes. We also had petroleum products for the navy, aviation gas and lube oil. For the army, we had aviation gas, high-test gas for vehicles, and then lube oils. We also handled tanks for the army. The Ford Motor Company across the street suspended its operation of making automobiles and became a tank assembly plant. They just had a very large semi-truck/tractor unit haul the tank over to the dock, line them up, and then we'd put them aboard.

Beginning of ContainerizationPilferage on the Docks and Ships

Cox: The docks all around the bay, including Richmond, were thrust into the modern world rather abruptly. It was at this time that we began to hear the first ideas about containerization. Pilferage was a very big problem on the waterfront and on the ships.

Dunning: Was it excessive during the war period?

Cox: Yes. Well, you'd take a thousand tons of beer per shipment, and you'd know that a very substantial amount of it, maybe six or seven hundred cases of beer, would never arrive.

Dunning: Would that be within the work force or outsiders?

Cox: It would be within the work force on the docks, but on the ships also. This is when we first began to talk about putting them in steel boxes or steel crates, which later became known as containers.

Of course, the containers didn't appear until really about the middle of the Korean War. It's quite interesting that the Port of Richmond reminds me very much of a piece of cork floating in the surf: one wave would come along and lift the cork up, and then she'd drop, and another wave would come. The waves I'm speaking about are World War II--that was the first huge wave, and it got everybody all tooled up--then that settled. Before we had a chance to even clean up the docks, figuratively speaking, the Korean War came along, and gave a big boost. Then along came the Vietnam War, which gave us another big shove.

Korean War Boost

Dunning: How was the Korean War boost compared to World War II? You never hear about that.

Cox: No, that's the forgotten war. The developments of the Korean War, as far as the Port of Richmond was concerned, were less striking by far. There was no great shipbuilding crisis. There was not the desire to find transport, because there were plenty of vessels available. The problem with the Korean War was that seventy-five or eighty percent of the products that went over the Port of Richmond went to Japan, because Japan became the big refitting and repair center for the army. It was true that we handled petroleum products that went particularly to ports in the Vietnam area, but by this time, you see, the bases in the Philippines and the bases in Japan had been well established, and lots of our shipments went to those places.

Military Scrap:--Flow of Inbound and Outbound Military Equipment

Cox: Then, of course, the big Japanese companies, like Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, Nipon Steel, and others, did a lot of repair work, and so parts that were fabricated to fit the American equipment and ships went over to Japan in quantity. There was an interesting phenomenon at the end of World War II which carried over to the Korean War, even while it was going on, and that was the returning of military goods, either to be stockpiled by the army or navy someplace, or to be sold as scrap. Much of the material that came back to the U.S.A. was already purchased in the Orient by American scrap dealers. Paul Lerner, one of the big scrap dealers in town here, Luria Brothers--they were the largest scrap dealers in the world--and a number of other companies, brought in military scrap in a semi-prepared form to Richmond.

Dunning: What does that mean, "semi-prepared"?

Cox: For instance, they wouldn't take a military tank that had been blown up or damaged, buy that and bring it home, they would cut it up in the Orient so that it would stow better. The majority of that scrap, being military scrap, was then cut up as No. 1 heavy melting grade, so that went directly to the furnaces, to different steel mills in this area--of which, incidentally, there are no more. We had this interesting flow of inbound military equipment--pretty well destroyed--and outbound military equipment to the combat areas.

Dunning: The outbound military equipment would be going to the Orient for repairs?

Cox: No, they were parts that were going to repair depots. Some of the equipment we handled went directly to Vietnam, but the Port of Richmond didn't get the vehicles. Well, we got some. Southern California, and to a certain extent the ports of Oakland and San Francisco, got things set up. We got cases and cases of tractor parts, of engine parts, and we got the treads for tractors and all sorts of things. We were fairly busy with the Korean War, but we were equally busy unloading scrap. This scrap didn't only come from Korea, it came usually from the South Pacific, because that area was swarming with scrap buyers.

For economic reasons our government decreed that you couldn't return bulldozers, for instance, from the South Pacific. You had to cut them so they couldn't be used because they didn't want to interrupt the sale of bulldozers here in the United States. You'd take a forty or fifty thousand dollar machine, just take a torch and cut right through the engine and the transmission and right down through the frame. You'd just cut it in two pieces, and then bring it to the U.S.A. as scrap iron.

Dunning: So they weren't exactly recyclable.

Cox: They were not.

Dunning: Was that a government decision?

Cox: Yes, of course it was. Scrap dealers had to conform to that.

Exhibiting Japanese Aircraft to Sell War Bonds

Cox: One of the things during World War II that was interesting was that we handled a number of Japanese aircraft that had been salvaged that were not wrecked,

Cox: they were set up. You could see where the American machine gunners had just made uniform holes all along the sides of the plane. They were being accepted all over the United States to accelerate the sale of U.S. savings bonds, war bonds. Those were hard to handle because they were so bulky. The wings didn't fold back, and you had to treat them as if they were planes that could fly. They didn't want them damaged by stevedores. They had quite a few of those, there must have been dozens.

Dunning: Did that start mid-war?

Cox: Yes. We're talking about the Pacific war now. It started during the last year and a half of the Pacific war. We'd been bringing in some airplanes to exhibit, with the big red insignias on the wings and sides.

Dunning: Could you give me an example of where they would be exhibited? Did you actually see them exhibited?

Cox: I saw them prepared for exhibit, I never went around to them.

Dunning: I just wondered if they exhibited them in the Bay Area.

Cox: Oh, yes, the Bay Area and through the Midwest, to the East even. They put the Japanese aircraft on big trucks and hauled them over to where they were having ceremonies, or on railroad cars. Tonnage-wise that was trivia, it was just interesting to handle it.

We did handle several times in the Korean War the coffins of some of the men that were killed and were shipped down to the big morgue at the Oakland Army Base. Usually those ships went directly to the Oakland Army Base, but sometimes there were only a few of these coffins, and the ship was in a hurry, so they discharged them at Richmond.

Deepening_Richmond's_Channels

Cox: One of the problems during the war was that the ships were getting bigger, and the City of Richmond and the federal government had to work out cooperative arrangements to deepen the channel, particularly at the inner harbor. The Standard Oil people kept their channel dredged pretty much. I would say that during World War II the channel was deepened by at least three feet, and usually they dredged deeper by four or five feet plus a foot deeper as anticipatory maintenance.

Dunning: Who would pay for that?

Cox: The state and federal government, usually. Of course, in front of our docks we had to pay for it. The theory was that one ship's width out from the fender was our responsibility. That was trivia compared to the dredging of the channels. I would say we could keep our docks dredged, at the inner harbor anyway, with twenty-four hours of work--we could take it down three feet. Silt comes in there--at least when I was there--at the rate of about one inch a month, so a foot a year would be the silt deposited. It would come down with the rivers and rush in with the flood tide and then stop. Just like an impounding basin, it would stop and everything settled out. Then she'd drift out with the ebb, but the ebb wasn't strong enough to carry anything out.

Post-War Change in the Industrial Complex of Richmond

Departure of the Pullman Shops

Cox: The major addition in Richmond during World War II was the construction of enormous housing units. That didn't occur in any of the other wars because there was no shipbuilding requirement. There already was a change in the industrial complex of Richmond. It started at the end of World War II, and carried on at a rate which accelerated right after the Korean War and reached its peak during the Vietnam War. Companies that had been long-time fixtures in Richmond just disappeared, went to greener pastures. Like the Pullman Company: it was very active repairing Pullman cars but after the Korean War they moved out, and for many years the factory building was vacant. Then my brother Fred Cox bought the property and sub-leased it to small boat builders and other operations. Later he sold the land and buildings to some other groups. The Pullman Company was a tremendous factor in employment, and handled the repairs of all the Pullman cars in this part of the West Coast. That went out of business. American Brass left, and quite a few research companies that had sprung up in North Richmond left.

Dunning: Do you have theories about why they left at that time?

Cox: Yes, I have a theory, or an impression. We were beginning to feel the effect of the change from a smokestack oriented industrial complex to a service complex. Companies that had many branches found themselves in the position of either having to consolidate at one or several main branches, or go out of business. U.S. Steel, and a number of companies such as Standard Sanitary hung on for quite a while, but I think they're gone. My brother brought many companies into Yard No. 1, where the ships had been built during

- Cox: World War II, people like the Baker Chocolate Company, that packaged grated coconut and bread and cake mixes. He brought in Atlantic Products, which made luggage. He brought in the very big International Harvester operation--they had a huge plant. He must have brought in fifteen or twenty companies to the Richmond area.
- Dunning: Post-war?
- Cox: Yes. However, he was already expanding nationwide. My brother was a very, very able man. He was very much the same temperament as my uncle, as far as being able to attract industry. A good salesman and competent. He brought the Garwood Industries into Richmond--they had a big, big plant there. Of course, they are long gone.
- Dunning: What was their business?
- Cox: They built truck bodies, particularly garbage truck bodies that compress the garbage that's thrown in by the collectors. They were one of the biggest at the time. They didn't stay. He brought in a number of smaller industries, I think Napco was one of them--they're still there. He brought in a very large company from Duluth that set up a big yard and handled the imported Japanese and foreign cars in Richmond. That was a huge operation. We got some of the cars over the dock, and some of them were unloaded in Oakland. He brought that in. [pause] I don't know, there are so many industries that he brought in.
- Dunning: I have a list of a few industries, and I just wonder if any of them stand out in your mind as ones that your uncle or your brother or yourself brought in.
- Cox: I never brought any industries in. My job was to run the waterfront. [looks at list] Well, a lot of these have come in these last few years. However, most of them were brought in by my brother Fred Cox.

Dunning: That was a report from the early seventies.

Cox: Pacific Vegetable Oil my uncle brought in, and Pacific Molasses was there when we came. Petromark came in and I think the City of Richmond is as much responsible for that as we are. My uncle brought in the Time Oil Company, and my uncle and my brother brought in the Union Carbide Corporation. There are a lot of industries, not as large maybe, but equally numerous that they brought in.

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Then both my uncle and my brother went nationwide. Many of the industries that came into the Richmond area were looking for export, and of course that activity declined. Others were dependent upon the steel industry, which folded rapidly. The social climate in Richmond frightened many industrialists.

Dunning: Beginning right back to the World War II era?

Cox: Yes. The shipyards began to fold up. People were living in Richmond and there was not the employment. Housing was deteriorating at a rapid rate. People were living in what I would call substandard housing.

Parr_Builds_Housing_Development

Parchester Village and Deluxe Homes

Cox: Our company, recognizing the fact that some people had jobs and wanted to have better houses, built several developments. This was after World War II. One was a development over by the Richmond Hospital called Deluxe Homes. We built about a 150 units. Most of them were

Cox: duplexes, and some were four-unit homes, all one-story. Then we built Parchester Village in North Richmond, a hundred and some-odd homes. We tried to make it a really nice residential area.

Dunning: Was the City of Richmond involved?

Cox: No.

Dunning: That was just Parr Terminal?

Cox: We brought in a few stockholders from outside, but it was our venture.

Dunning: That turned out to be a pretty controversial area, even at that time.

Cox: Yes.

Dunning: But you went ahead and did it.

Cox: Yes. It ended up rather amazingly. People that had moved into the homes at the Deluxe Homes project, say, they'd take a duplex, and one of the families would say, "We'd like to buy the duplex, because we can live off the rentals from the other side." Before very long all of them had been sold--I mean within a period of, say, three years. In the Parchester operation we were to sell them directly. We didn't hold them out for a lease, but they were very inexpensive homes, and quite well built. We had partners in that, including Earl Smith--known as "Flat-top" Smith--who built many thousands of homes in Contra Costa County using that design which he'd developed at Parchester.

The Richmond Foundry Company was out in North Richmond too. That disappeared because the plastic sewer pipe and ceramic sewer pipe replaced cast iron pipe. The building is still there, but I don't think they do any business.

Dunning: I wanted to ask you about Parchester, because of this controversy.

Cox: What part of the controversy?

Dunning: Well, in your original concept, was it going to be a completely black area?

Cox: No. We advertised that this was "an American Community," that was our slogan. About thirty percent of the sales were to Caucasians, and the rest were to black people or Oriental people. Within a couple of years the community changed completely to all black. We did not intend it for anybody except for those able to purchase.

My uncle Fred Parr was quite an interesting man. He was hard as nails, and a tremendous driver as a business man. He worked all day and almost all night. In the morning we'd see stacks and stacks of notes--I don't just mean one or two, I mean whole pads full of notes around his bed. He also gave one-third of his time and one-third of his money to charity. He was one of the few that tried early on to have equal housing for everybody. At that time it wasn't as fashionable as it is now to say that, but he was a leader in that regard, for which I give him credit. I myself wasn't active in this too much. I was down on the waterfront.

My brother was also very active in that sort of thing, and he followed my uncle's tradition. He doesn't give a third of his time, but he's very active in charitable groups. He's been on the board of directors of the Salvation Army for years, and that type of thing.

My uncle did something that was kind of novel. In the so-called Iron Triangle area of Richmond is a number of churches, mostly churches of black people. He went over there, and he told them what he was going to do; that he was going to build these houses, and that

Cox: they should know that they were for everybody. He went to four or five churches. In fact, he made me come with him a couple of times because I drove the car for him. He was a little timid about walking around at night in some of those areas, so I went with him. We went over there and got some fabulous chicken dinners, heard some wonderful choir music, I've got to say that.

Japanese Factor in Pacific Coast Tonnage

Cox: A phenomenon I'd like to speak to, because I think it's very, very, very important, is that, at the conclusion of the war, the Japanese became a factor in the tonnage over the Port of Richmond as well as on the entire Pacific coast. Over the docks at the Port of Richmond went all kinds of rebuilding materials: machine tools, tools for the fabrication of all sorts of things. This phenomenon occurred all up and down the Pacific Coast, but I saw it particularly in Richmond. Our family always had very close ties with Japanese people because we had them as tenants and neighbors in Palo Alto. In the south part of Palo Alto we had about two hundred and some odd Japanese people that we knew by name.

Dunning: Before the war.

Cox: Yes. I think I told you earlier that we stored some of their commodities.

Dunning: Yes.

Cox: I remembered and spoke a little "kitchen" Japanese, and we were loading scrap iron for Japan. So I went over to Japan to talk to the recipients of the cargos, and to frankly tell them that if they received cargo that was not up to grade it was not my fault, because I loaded

Cox: what was given to me. One fellow particularly put a lot of rock in the scrap iron and wanted me to say "scrap iron."

All I would say is "material" on my manifest. He got furious, but I said "material." So I went over to tell these people that I didn't load this rock as scrap iron. In fact, I couldn't use my magnets, I had to use clamshell buckets. True, it had some iron in it--welding rod butts, and very inferior bits of slag and things like that--but there were a few hundred tons of that stuff.

So I got talking to the Japanese people, and talking to some of the brokers, and it ended up that we handled over a million tons of iron ore to Japan. I became very good friends with a number of the companies, and it was at that time that I was given some decorations for work with the wartime Japanese here in the United States--Japanese Americans.

Dunning: Was this increase in cargo to Japan immediately after World War II? Or was it gradually developing?

Cox: I'd say that the flow of scrap iron cargo reached its peak about three years after the war, and maintained itself at a high level for many years. I made some thirty-odd trips to Japan. Then I got to know many of the officials in steel industry, and many of the officials in other industries, and quite of few of the government people.

Dunning: Was that a big switch for you? Going from being the operations man to doing these negotiations?

Cox: No, because I was talking about operations over there. It was loading ships.

Dunning: Would you do this independent of your uncle and brother?

Cox: Oh, yes. This was the waterfront. My uncle and my brother were busy as bees all over the United States. Together they built the first, second, and third largest wooden warehouses in the world under one roof. I got to be friendly with the Japanese. I could understand dimly a little of what they were speaking, but I knew the customs, and I got along very well. But we were always talking about ships. I helped some of the companies design the cargo spaces of a scrap carrier so they could be loaded rapidly and inexpensively, and discharged relatively inexpensively. Things like that.

This is the time when you could see it on the horizon that Japan was going to be something to deal with. I saw the destruction of the steel industry in Japan, and then, because of American aid--the Marshall Plan and other things--it was rebuilt on modern lines. I tried to fit Richmond into that as best I could. I found that the thing they wanted were raw materials, so that's what I worked on.

Formation of Parr Industrial Corporation

Dunning: What sort of raw materials?

Cox: Ores and coal. By this time the shipyards had been put up for sale, and my uncle and brother formed Parr Industrial Corporation, and split off completely from the Terminal Company. They owned the shipyards, but I saw that I had a chance to load iron ore, so I leased a portion of Yard No. 1 for handling iron ore from the Industrial Corporation.

Handling Iron Ore

Dunning: "You" were Parr-Richmond Terminals.

Cox: Yes.

Dunning: And you leased the shipyard from Parr Industrial Corporation?

Cox: Yes. Just the portion of the dock where we could load and store. We had a stockpile at one time of eighty thousand tons of iron ore. We handled in one lot a million tons, and in another lot four hundred thousand tons. We handled a lot of dead-burn magnesite, which is used to make the brick linings for furnaces. We handled quite a few materials.

The only business that I really tried to engender as export from the United States was when I saw that lots of logs were going out of the Pacific Northwest, so I went around and got logs that the forest service had ordered felled, and sent those logs to Japan. Most of the time I was busy trying to satisfy the demands of the ore shippers and the ore importers. The problem there was that, with the winter weather in Nevada, the carloads of ore would freeze. They'd get rained on and then they'd be frozen coming over the grade between Truckee and Roseville. Then there were breakdowns at the iron ore plant at Wabuska, Nevada, where they were loaded. So I kept a big stockpile on hand, and it worked out pretty well.

Dunning: Did they store it in warehouses?

Cox: No, they were huge mountains of iron ore. I don't think I have any pictures left. I had hundreds of pictures, but I left them all over in Richmond. Most of them were

Cox: thrown away, and I think the Levin Company has retained some, I'm not sure. I've never seen their files, nor will I.

The war was a fascinating time, because all the old-timers on the waterfront, as far as the Port of Richmond and the Parr-Richmond Terminal were concerned, went into the military except me. At that time I was six foot five, and I went down to volunteer for the California Maritime Academy, but they wouldn't take me because I was too tall. By that time then I got a deferment because I was the only living male on the Richmond waterfront who knew how to load ships and who could handle cargo. So I employed women. I got a staff of women there. Some of them were the wives of shipyard workers, and one was the wife of a university professor, but they put in their hours and they worked like hell.

Dunning: What would their jobs be?

Cox: They were all in the office handling the paperwork, because the work on the dock was completely unionized. All of the clerical workers on the dock and the cargo handlers on the dock were all members of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union, or the Ship-Clerk's Union, or the Operating Engineers' Union. We had many cranes and other equipment working there. At one time I had twelve cranes in back lots working during the war. The hours were cruel, but in a sense we felt that we were doing a hell of a good job, and I was young enough so that I didn't mind.

Dunning: Do you consider World War II to be about your most lucrative period for Parr-Richmond Terminal?

Cox: No. The most lucrative period came after I started to handle iron ore for the Japanese. We also did other things. Right after the war the cargo dropped off--this is between the big war and the Korean War--we stored almost fifteen thousands tons of raw rubber at Terminal

Cox: No. 3. Then another time I stored about twenty-two thousand tons inside the shed at Terminal No. 3 of barley, in bulk, for which the dock was not constructed, but we held the barley for one year and it was exported. Then I also constructed ten, twenty thousand barrel capacity tanks, and for about five years held coconut oil for the General Services Administration.

Dunning: Where were those tanks?

Cox: The tanks were built on the shipyard property behind the office by the Parr-Terminal Railroad switchyard. We held that coconut oil for a long time. I also contracted to build three tanks at Point San Pablo, with a total capacity of about twenty-five thousand tons, of JP-4 jet fuel. They're still there. I sold those to the city.

Relationship with the City of Richmond

Dunning: I wanted to ask you about your relationship with the City of Richmond. In some of my reading I saw that a few members of the city council in the late forties, James Kenny and Gay Vargas, criticized the 1926 Parr lease. Their complaint was that the Parr Company was making money, while the city was losing it. That resulted in a study in 1950, and a report by Alvarez. Do you have any recollections of that?

Cox: Yes, my recollections are rather--well, they have to be personal, of course. Number one, we offered a very excellent target, and these people were elected on the basis of their getting themselves in the newspaper. But I'll tell you where their opposition arose, and from their side I can't blame them. My uncle was the most genial and delightful man to others, but when he was inhibited or crossed in any way he hit back pretty hard.

Cox: He played into these fellows' hands, because every time they'd say something, he'd take out an ad in the newspaper and call them incompetent--at the mildest. So it became more or less a personal feud.

When Fred Parr left the waterfront I was there, and I got to be very good friends with all of these people. A couple of times I went to their homes for dinner. My idea was, I'm not mad at anybody--and I wasn't. We got along fine, and then we had a Mr. Domingo come with us as a general manager. He was an excellent man to make friends with people. He made friends with everybody on the city council. And goodness, all of this acrimony ended up so that we were at the point where we couldn't move, because many of the things that had to be done, we had to get the city to agree to.

Declaratory Relief Suit Against the City

Cox: So we got some Richmond attorneys, including former Senator Tony DeLap and the San Francisco law firm of Bronson, Bronson, and McKinnon, and we filed a suit against the city in declaratory relief. That's a very interesting suit. It's not a suit that asks for damages. A suit in Declaratory Relief has two advantages: one, it's immediately put on the calendar; secondly, it's not a suit where you're mad at somebody. It's a suit that says to the court, "We cannot agree on what is the interpretation of a particular document. We agree to abide by whatever comes out of the judicial forum there."

We went up to Martinez and had this action in court, and everything was cleared up rather quickly. I think it was within three or four weeks. We felt that

Cox: we were vindicated in the position that we'd taken, and after that we had no problems working with the city in the administration of the '26 and '36 lease.

Dunning: I was under the impression that the City of Richmond brought Parr Terminal to court--

Cox: No way.

Dunning: --to break the lease, and lost.

Cox: No, no, no. We filed the Declaratory Action suit.

Dunning: It was in certain reports that have been written recently, so it's good to clear it up.

Cox: Well, I don't know who wrote it, nobody ever talked to me. We filed the suit without the knowledge of the city--we didn't tell them we were going to file it. We waited until it went into the press, while everything was quiet, and then we gave a copy of the suit to all of the newspapers in the area so it would receive equal printing the next day, and about fifteen minutes before the court had closed in Martinez we filed a suit for an interpretation. It was our action.

Dunning: Did the city--

Cox: The city had to respond to that, because they received a summons. They said there's a dispute on interpretation between us. I threw all those transcripts away about six weeks ago. I had them bound--I was pleased with my own oratory--but I threw them out.

No, that was a suit we brought, because we--. Let me give you an example: the union agreement said that we had to have adequate toilet facilities within a certain distance of where the men were working. On the city half of the dock, the toilets had been broken by vandals, and under the lease we could not enter to

repair them. The city had to repair them, but the city wouldn't do it. That was one of the trivial things. There were little things like that. All those things worked out, and rather amicably too, I thought.

After that, I made Mr. Domingo the executive general manager of the company. I never did much work with the city myself, I was always working with the Japanese. I worked almost continuously with the Japanese from the end of World War II on, because I could see that Japan was the only place in the Pacific that we were going to have any volume of cargo.

Regulatory Agencies

Dunning: Were there any organizations that oversaw your business?

Cox: In what way?

Dunning: In terms of regulations of the type of cargo. I'm thinking of the Coast Guard, the Army Corps of Engineers and the I.C.C.

Cox: The Interstate Commerce Commission. The Army Corps of Engineers doesn't oversee us. You get permits to make sure that every time you dredge they agree to that. Then in later years there was the California Coastal Commission, which was an albatross around everybody's neck. Hell, I had a telephone pole blow over, so I decided to put up two telephone poles and shorten the distance of the wires. They took an aerial photo and saw these two telephone poles where there was only one previously, and I got a nasty letter. I answered, I guess, in kind, and I know that the telephone company was just hectoring to death by these clowns. This was in the early days. Now I think they're a little more relaxed.

Use of DDT

Dunning: Did you have any connection with the Regional Water Quality Board, or was that later?

Cox: I never had any connection with them, ever. One of the tenants on the property, when it was owned by my brother, a chemical company, the Heckathorn Company, got cited many times for dumping DDT overside. Finally I bought the whole shipyard from my brother, and this company was still extant, but they only operated there for a couple of years and then they went out of business, but I never entered their building so I don't know exactly when they quit. Now various state agencies are suing the present owners of the property, Levin Metals, telling them to contain the DDT. I'm involved in that, because I was a former owner.

Dunning: Is that the Levin Metals case?

Cox: Yes.

Dunning: Was there any emphasis on toxic material at that time?

Cox: Everybody thought DDT was the savior of the world. Hell, they were taking immigrants coming in and they'd spray them all over with aerosol cans, and soldiers got these aerosol bombs to set off in their tents every night before they got into their tent. DDT was spread around by farmers like you can't believe. The strange part of it is that it's still being used in California. Anyone that has a stock of it can still use it, but a lot of it is being smuggled in from Mexico.

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The regulating bodies now are becoming so numerous that I'm awfully glad that I'm not in the business. I don't see how anybody can survive.

Dunning: When did you first start seeing the regulatory commissions come on the scene in Richmond?

Cox: They came on the scene before we even started an operation. All intrastate commodities, and the rates charged over the wharves for intrastate, were under the jurisdiction of the California Railroad Commission, which later became the California Public Utilities Commission. Then the rates charged for off-shore material were under the jurisdiction of the Federal Maritime Commission.

We broke away from the railroad commission quite early in the game, because we were able to show we never handled any intrastate material. We didn't. The coast-wise business was shot to hell, and we didn't have anything. We were under the jurisdiction of the Maritime Commission, but we could make our own tariffs if we made them in a group. Under Section 16 of the U.S. Shipping Act, if you meet in concert to set rates, and you file the rates and the minutes of the meeting with the United States Maritime Commission, you can set whatever rates will cause the traffic to flow in the greatest volume.

So rate cutting was not a big thing. But my goodness, we'd begun to get form letters from labor administrators in Washington, labor department people, and public health people, and oh, God, the amount of trivia that came in! We had to write reports, and there were other groups that wanted statistical reports, which, to my personal knowledge, they always checked to see that they received them, but they never opened or studied them. Because I built the incinerator where the reports were burned back in Arlington, Virginia, and I saw these truckloads of envelopes that were marked that they'd been received, but the contents were not examined.

Cox: Just truckloads, and this was a document that had about fifteen or twenty pages, all together, like a great scroll. It took several days to fill the damn thing in.

Dunning: Would you be the one to fill out the report?

Cox: Me personally? No, I never filled out anything like that. People in the office did. Then other groups came in representing labor, minority, and similar matters. In the first place we had to sign an agreement that we didn't have any discrimination in our company--well, we didn't. I had people of all races.

Dunning: Was this in the sixties, during the civil rights period?

Cox: Yes. We had almost every race in our office, and on the docks, of course, ninety-five percent of the employees were blacks. We had to say that we did not recognize, among other things, color. Okay. Then about two weeks later I got another report from a crowd that wanted for me to report how many people of each race I had in my company. So all I did was xerox the first report, attach it to that report, say, "Look at your own damn file," in those words, and send it back to them. I never heard from them again.

The idiocy of the thing became just incredible. I always liked competent people--anyone that's competent I love. This business of just sending out forms to keep yourself busy angered all of the companies in the shipping game. We got scads of that sort of thing. Other than that we weren't bothered by civil rights programs. The waterfront was pretty free of that kind of harassment. Some other companies were bothered, and many of them deserved to be bothered, but some didn't. On the waterfront everybody began to realize that it was a very mixed bag of people working there.

Limitations of Richmond's Container Facility, Terminal No. 3

Cox: The thing that the wars did was to gear us up to handle the shipments of this current age and the way they were shipped, with the exception of containers. The only containers I could ever handle were inbound, and those were inbound for repairs, because I didn't have the staging area to accumulate many containers. About twelve or fifteen years ago we sold Point San Pablo, Terminal No. 4, Terminal No. 1, and our interest in Terminal No. 3 to the City of Richmond. The first thing they did was to tear out the big shed at Terminal No. 3 and put in a container plant that is unbelievably fantastic in what it can do, but it's crowded into far too small a space.

The next thing they did--now, this is just my opinion--the people that they hired to solicit steamer lines to come were not men who were real experts in this business. They may be good talkers, but that isn't what brings in the cargo. What you do with a container system is, you don't go around and talk to shippers, you go around and talk to the carriers and make a deal with a carrier, and you do that before you build anything--hopefully. The Mitsubishi Company just tried so hard to work with me on how to put a container station where I was, at Shipyard No. 1, and even with the amount of land we had, I couldn't fit it in.

Dunning: Did you need enough space for two ships?

Cox: Yes, you should have two berths.

Dunning: Do you think that's one of the major problems in the container port in Richmond?

Cox: The container port doesn't have a big enough marshalling yard, and why should a vessel shift over to Richmond when Oakland just lays everything out and says, "Here you are. Whatever you need, it's already here!" I thought that was a sad, sad situation in Richmond. But they never asked me, and I never said anything. I didn't like the people that were in that promotion. I thought they were enthusiastic, but that doesn't do anything to bring business. You have to know the game, and you have to know who you're talking to. If it had been me, and I was very close to the Japanese shipping lines, I would have gone over to Japan and just made love to them by the hour, and had them help me design the plant.

What should have happened is that the University of California property should be taken in as a marshalling yard--that big unused parking lot.

Dunning: What exactly is a marshalling yard?

Cox: That's where you bring in cargo, and sort it, and segregate it, and tell what ship it's going on. You have rail connection as well as highway connection. I would have done that, and I would have closed South Tenth Street. But at that time the University of California had just acquired the property and was beginning to feel its oats and had lots of ideas of glory, and the City of Richmond was already seeing that they were running short of money--it was a mess. If you'd had a steamer line behind you you could have gone to a bank, no problem. But again that's just my opinion, that's nothing official, or a condemnation of the City of Richmond or the University of California or anybody, it's just what I think.

Dunning: You were right there seeing it, and you've seen it from the beginning.

Cox: I've watched it with a great deal of sadness, because I felt that the City of Richmond was going to end up in a very, very strange position, of having a beautiful facility that was too small and no real contracting carriers. Matson, you see, used the City of Richmond in order to gain further concessions in Oakland, by saying, "Oh, we're going to go to Richmond." And everybody knew it, damn it, the whole waterfront knew it. Oakland didn't scare too much, but they at least listened, and Matson worked out a deal with them. Matson had no intention of going to Richmond--that's in my opinion, just an opinion. But everybody on the waterfront was talking about that, and how foolish Richmond was to count on Matson.

Future for Port of Richmond

Dunning: This is jumping ahead a bit, but where do you think the Port of Richmond is going to go, if any place?

Cox: It's going to revert to what it was pre-war. The tonnage will be much higher, and the activity will be higher, as far as the amount of dollars moving over the waterfront, but the oil companies, those who use tankers will be the principal shippers. Petromark out at Terminal No. 1 will give its small share; the oil terminals out on the inner harbor will give their share; Standard Oil will give the overwhelming share, and there will be a little bit of bulk liquids out at Point San Pablo. But I can't see anything beyond that. Richmond as a general cargo port is finished.

Dunning: What do you think is going to happen to the container port--anything?

Cox: It would take a far greater mind than mine. I still say that they would have a chance if they would close South Fourth Street, enlarge their marshalling area, and really work hard to get a shipping line. If they had a good steamship service, that would act as a nucleus around which other vessels of opportunity, if things were crowded in Oakland, might come in. But as it is now, it's going to be rather dead for a long time.

The thing that kept the Port of Richmond going, and kept me going, was the enormous appetite of the steel mills around northern California for various ores and various scrap irons. They produced a lot of home scrap, like billet crop ends and that sort of material. For instance I used to get all of Niles's billet crop ends for export--that's when they make a billet, and it's a little bit too long, and they chop off a piece. Scrap dealers buy it and export it.

Pittsburg is gone; Judson Steel has an electric furnace, and they use what little they have, but all of the open-hearth furnaces are gone. The blast furnace at Niles is gone. Pittsburg is out completely. Oh, they make nails or something up there from wire that's fabricated elsewhere. The steel industry is no longer a factor. Richmond is entering the age of bulk liquid cargos almost exclusively. Selby's gone, the big smelter's gone that was up there.

Idea for Commercial Fishing Business in Richmond

Cox: What Richmond is doing that is correct, in my opinion, is making available as much area as they can for the pleasure boat man, the man that has a yacht, or even a little trailer boat. There's another thing they could do if they would get off their backsides--they could develop a whale of a good commercial fish business. It

Cox: wouldn't be gigantic, because the industry has moved away mostly. They could have docks for commercial fishermen, an icehouse for commercial fishermen, proper handling facilities, places for brokerage and places for fish auction. You wouldn't put that down where the pleasure boats are, but it could be put many places.

Dunning: Have fish that would come in from different areas? The Richmond fishermen are really complaining--

Cox: Of course, fishermen always complain, but the fish that would come in from the larger boats that fish way up by Crescent City, or almost down in the Santa Barbara Channel, and fish out for albacore 250 miles--boats like that. Of course, you'd include the smaller boats too, that fish offshore here. The fish are there, if there was a place where you could handle them readily. San Francisco has not yet done this, although they swear they're going to turn Pier 45 into a place for commercial fishermen.

I've owned canneries--I say "I" meaning the company where I've been the president. I've had canneries in southern California, and fish reduction plants down there and up here in Richmond, and a fish reduction plant in Peru--which didn't work out. But I know the fishing business. I fish myself, and I know that the fishermen here complain, but one of the reasons they complain is that there really is no place for them to operate from that is really good. Fisherman's Wharf is a dirty mess as far as trying to handle fish. It goes back before the 1906 earthquake and fire, and there's been very little change since then. The big marinas for the pleasure boats have occupied good spaces, but there's still plenty of room in Richmond if they wanted to do it. Whether or not they will, I don't know.

San Francisco should do it, and I think they will. If they do, then there'll be no time for Richmond--Richmond will have lost the ball again.

Dunning: If you had to chose a site in Richmond to have a commercial fishing business on the existing waterfront, where would it be?

Cox: There are several places I would select: one, between Terminal No. 1 and the Santa Fe slip. For a second, you'd have to build a breakwater up, fix up a harbor there, and get some land behind it from the Santa Fe--I think that would be very possible. Another place I would think about it would be Point San Pablo itself, although I don't recommend that as a first choice because of the surge in the wintertime. The other place that I would really think about would be on the area now occupied by Shipyard No. 3. Some of that land is available, and it's not going to be usable for ships very much longer.

On the big turning basin behind what's now the University of California plant there's a lot of space that's good, and there's the University of California property itself. They have some big amphibian planes or something laying out there that are just rotting away. I haven't looked at them for many years. That would be a place. There's quite a few.

Dunning: There are places.

Cox: Yes, sure. You want to get a place that has easy transportation, has access, if possible, to a sewer system, and has the ability to have berth and to have some freezer sheds and some shed for peripheral office workers, fish brokers, truckers, and even boat maintenance people. It would be like a little complex for handling the fish. That would be something.

I'm too old to have enthusiastic ideas any more. I think Richmond has locked itself into a position in which it's going to be very difficult to become a number one port--for anything except the Standard Oil. In Point San Pablo they could, if they'd go around where

Cox: that yacht harbor is with all those hulls. You could build a breakwater very much like what the hulls now provide. You could make that a point too, because it's far enough away from homes.

Dunning: Point San Pablo is a protected area too.

Cox: It is. I don't know if you've been out there in the wintertime, but there's been some hellish surge. The wind comes down from the northwest and the north and just howls down there, and I've seen waves twelve, fourteen feet break on the beach there.

If the navy would ever vacate Point Molate that would be another place, and I think the navy is not too keen about it. I hear dull rumors that it's already an anacronism, not too efficient.

Dunning: I thought the navy was going to try to sell that.

Cox: I've heard rumors to that effect. I don't think they're trying, but I think if somebody would come along that could say to them, "We won't tear out all the storage tanks you've put in, but we want to use some of the area you're not using, and in the event of wartime we'll let you use these tanks if you need them. We'll keep that option open for twenty years." With that type of agreement, I think they might do something, make a sublease, as they did for a while out here at the AAA Shipyard out at Hunter's Point.

I think Richmond's future as a heavy industrial city is doomed for the next quarter century.

Dunning: What about its future as a residential and light industry city?

Cox: Residential, yes. If it starts from the hills and works slowly down onto the flatlands, probably yes. Candidly, and this is completely off the record, it's my opinion

Cox: that many of the middle class black people are a little bit fearful of their life over there in Richmond right now. It's not a pleasant place, it reminds me of West Oakland. I have no answers--I'm too old to have answers.

Brickyard_Landing

Dunning: Have you been over to Marina Bay, and to Brickyard Landing?

Cox: Yes, I was over there a couple of days ago with my boat.

Dunning: What's your impression of that area?

Cox: Well, again, I've always liked that part of the harbor.

Dunning: The Brickyard Cove?

Cox: Yes, I've always liked it. I don't think it's the greatest place in the world to build a home, but if people like to have a home where they have a boat in the front yard I guess it's all right. I think it was an interesting development, but they made a mistake in my opinion. I was going to buy a lot there once--this is going back fifteen years--but I wanted to design my own home and have a summer place. But no, they wanted to tell you what to build. I told them I'd spend a certain amount of money, but no, they wanted to do it all--so, go ahead! I don't know what their policy is now.

Dunning: It seems that for most of the houses the people have designed their own, because every one of those houses is completely different.

Cox: Yes, they are, but when I first went over there they didn't want you to do that. They wanted to have the architectural prerogative. They made them different, sure--they didn't want row houses--but number one, I wanted a great many more pilings than they were putting in. I don't believe in building on engineered fill over on that part of the country. And I wanted to have a deck that was heavy enough that if I wanted to have a small boat--say twenty-four feet--I could lift it out of the water. They didn't want that, and they didn't like power boats at that time. They wanted you to have a sailboat. Well, good for them.

Dunning: Power boats weren't allowed?

Cox: They have some power boats, but very few. The people that own homes have a few power boats, but the yacht club there doesn't like power boats. Or they didn't--maybe they've embraced them now, but they didn't then.

Dunning: Have you ever been associated with the Richmond Yacht Club?

Cox: No. They wanted me to take my big boat and go out and have some judges on it for a race, and also be able to tow somebody back if necessary, but no. I'd already been turned down. I was going to take out a membership, but no. I gave them a very narrow strip, like ten feet wide or something, that went in that horrible triangle--I just gave it to them. Which they immediately forgot.

Dunning: They turned you down for a membership?

Cox: They said, "You've got to have a sailboat. We want sailboats." They didn't say I couldn't join, but they were a little bit restrictive. That's all right, I'm a member of three yacht clubs now, and I don't need any more. I'm an honorary member of the Inverness Yacht

Cox: Club, a member of the Marin Yacht Club, and a member of the St. Francis Yacht Club--and the Tokyo Bay Yacht Club, so that makes four.

Dunning: Before we close today I wanted to mention that Richmond is having its annual Festival by the Bay during the first weekend in September, and I'm going to have an oral history booth there. The Ghio brothers are going to be there in my booth weaving their fish nets. I will send you a notice on it, if you happen to be free that Sunday.

Cox: I'd like to see Angie Ghio again.

Dunning: I'm not sure if Angie will be there, although I'll ask. I know Dominic and Tony will be working on the nets, but if Angie's up to it maybe they will pick him up.

Cox: He's lived a good life. He was certainly nice to us, one of our best employees. He'd do anything, a fine gentleman.

I have nothing much more to say about Richmond, unless you have something that you want to ask me later on.

Dunning: After your tapes have been transcribed, then I'll be able to get an idea of whether there are areas that are missing, or some questions that do come up from what you've already said. Then maybe we can do one or two sessions after that just to kind of close things up.

Cox: Yes, that's right.

Dunning: And in the meantime, if there are things that you think are important--

Cox: Well, I've deliberately left out a lot of stuff because I don't know exactly what to say or not say. The story of the port itself is only, as far as I'm concerned,

Cox: about fifty percent told, but most of the things that I'd tell are only of value to me. I've tried to leave out as many personalities as I could in this talk, because many of them are not citizens of Richmond, and they've only cast a shadow for a few moments on the scene.

I feel sad, in a way. I take my boat and I go into the inner harbor quite often. Frankly, I feel very much as a father would, because, remember, I've been to Richmond regularly since I was six years old, and I've seen everything about the harbor--everything. It was a place that had in my opinion enormous potential--which the war shot in the head.

##

The war really set up a scene that no community could have recovered from. Then, as I say, there was the transition of American industry from smokestack to service, the big movement of companies to centralize rather than have branch offices. As far as shipping is concerned, there was the enormous change in the size of ships, where one container vessel carries literally ten times what was carried by vessels in 1935-36. There was the beginning of the use of containers, and the way Richmond is cut up. Richmond's future, I think, maybe lies seventy-five or a hundred years from now, but not much is going to happen until then. If a big company wanted to come in there and build a plant tomorrow morning, it would take a minimum of ten years just to get the permits--minimum. Look at the Dupont Company.

Candidly, there are so many people that are anti-industrial that it's a religion rather than a well thought-out philosophy--I think. Just my own musings. I don't mean industry that runs rough-shod over everybody, I'm talking about enlightened industry.

Dunning: For example?

Cox: Well, I watch what Standard Oil is doing. They don't want to pollute the bay intentionally, and they work hard to keep things clean and to keep odors from going over to the city. They have good employment practices, and they're doing a lot of research--their California research crowd there is right on its toes. I'm talking about industries like that. I'm not talking about people that come in and just hack up the property and the land and cause a lot of mess. The state of the art of steel making, for instance--you should see some of the plants in Japan where you could eat off the floor, then look at the plants that are in the U.S.A. U.S. Steel closed seventy-one plants, I read--so many of them were small--but seventy-one different operations around. Hell's bells, it's no wonder.

I've got to go to a meeting.

Dunning: I'll be thinking about other areas to discuss, and also I'd like you to. I've really enjoyed talking to you, and hearing your version of the story.

Cox: Well, that's it, it's a version, and every one has his own version.

Dunning: I always tell everyone that I never expect the whole story from any one person.

##



Port of Richmond
1930 2-3A
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Port of Richmond

2-7-33

2-3 (A 292)

Com & Photo View Co.



Santa Fe Canal
A 400-4

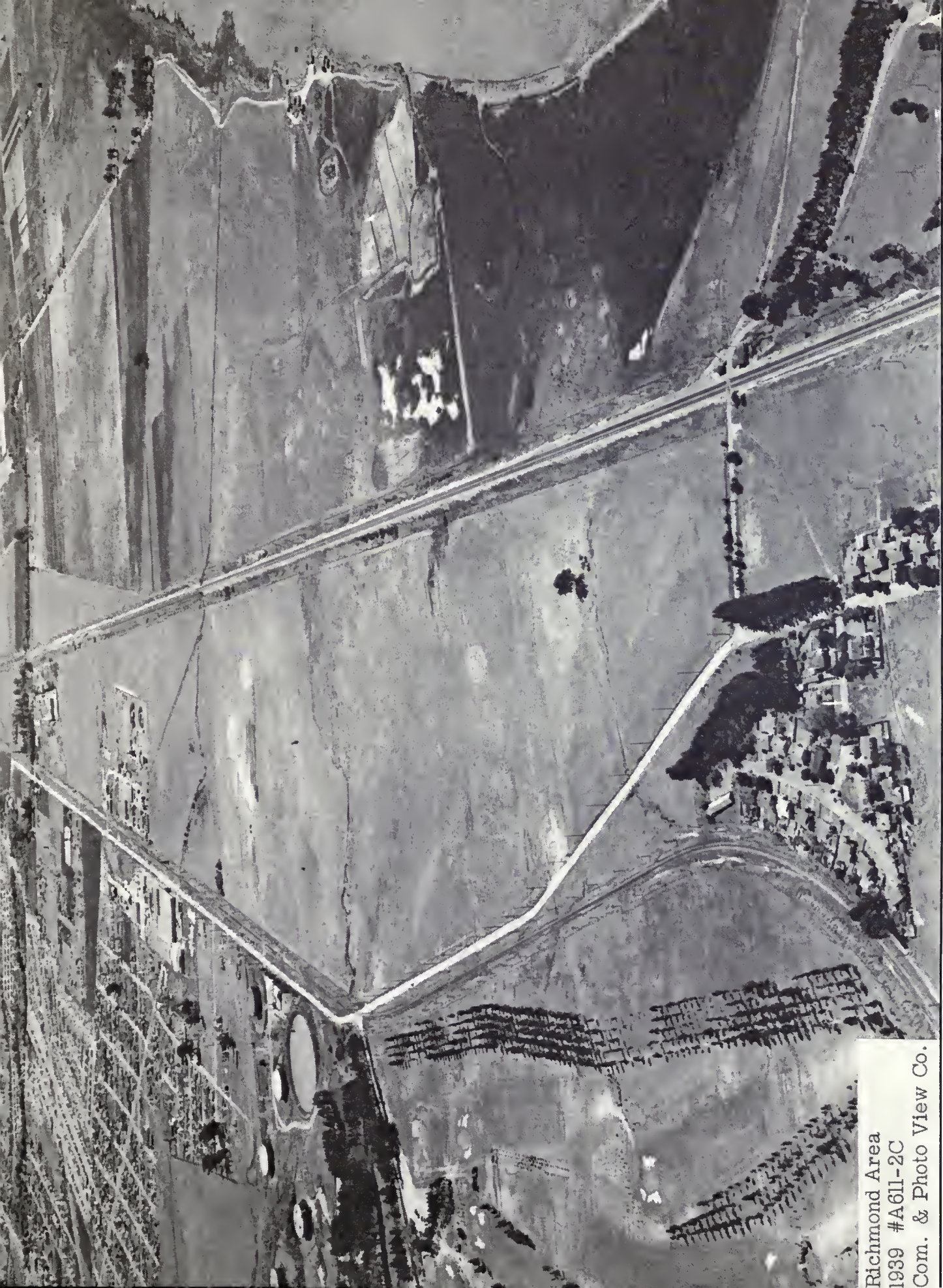
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October 1935
2-4A (#A 369A)

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Richmond Area
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STANDARD OIL CO.
TANK FARM


S.F. RY.

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General View, Richmond
June 1947
2-11 (#A 619-1)
Com. & Photo View Co.

Int. Harvester Co.
(circled)





Shipyard III Area, #3
April 1949
6-2 (199-A)
E. C. Brace



FIGURE 19
THE CENTRAL RICHMOND AREA, 1936



FIGURE 20
THE CENTRAL RICHMOND AREA, 1950

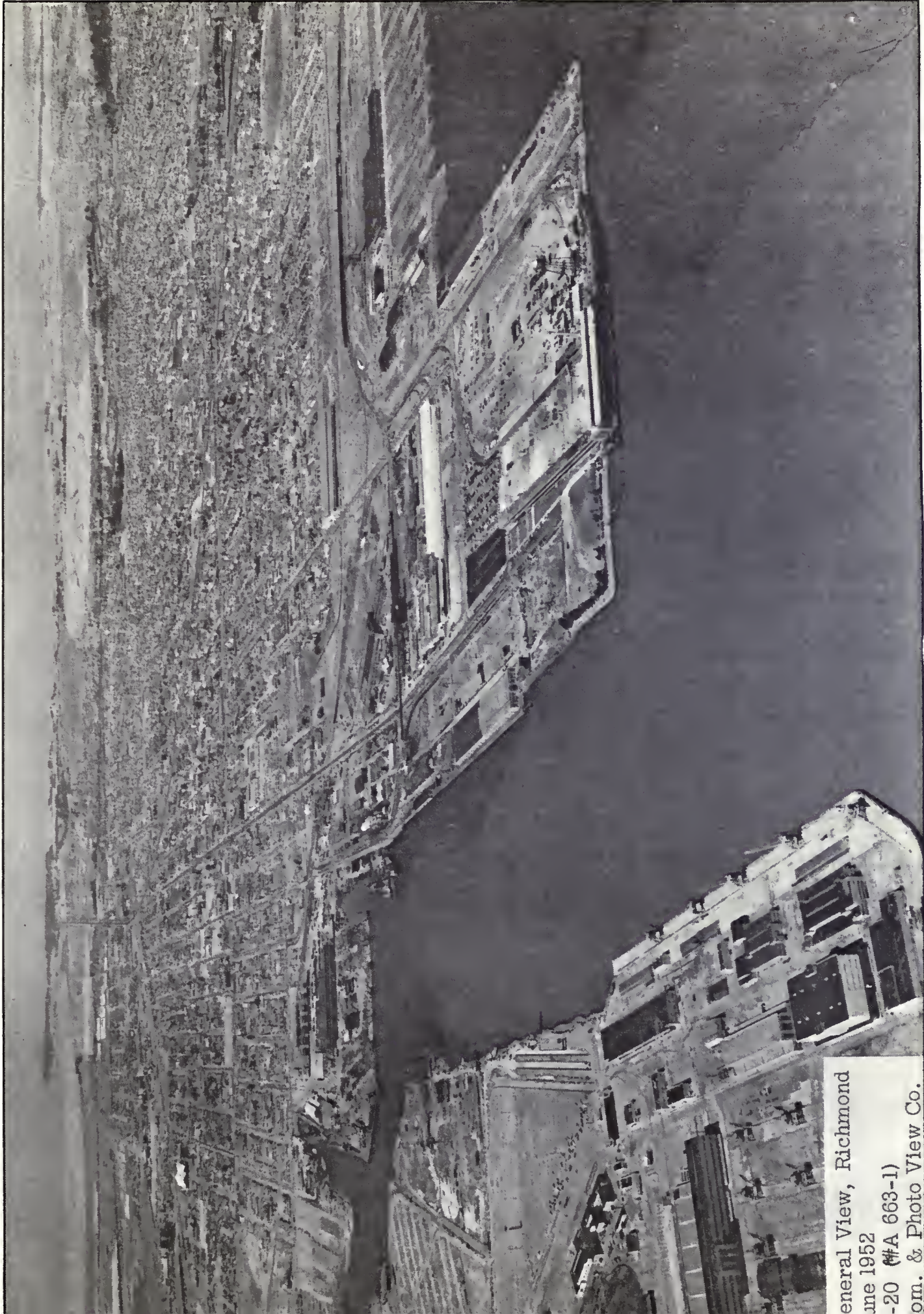
Richmond Area
October 17, 1950
#A 698



Richmond Area'
Parr-Richmond Ind. Dist.
October 1950
#1022-50 G-10-1
East Bay Aerial Photo



Port of Richmond
October 1950
2-16 (#A 637-3)
Com. & Photo View Co.



General View, Richmond
June 1952
-20 (#A 663-1)
om. & Photo View Co.



General View Richmond
 A -1661 Approx. 1958
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General View Richmond

10-11920

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